



Pelvic floor muscle exercises for women

Up to a third of women have a problem with their pelvic floor muscles at some point during their life.

The problem may be due to weak pelvic floor muscles. Or you might just need to learn to use your pelvic floor muscles in the right way and at the right time. Your pelvic floor muscles need to be kept strong and active, just like any other muscle in your body.

Where are my pelvic floor muscles?

They come from the bottom of your spine and attach onto your pubic bone at the front. They encircle the openings of your bladder, vagina and back passage.

What do they do?

They support your pelvic organs from underneath. They act like a sling within your pelvis. They help you to control when you decide to empty your bladder and bowel.

What can cause pelvic floor muscle problems?

It can be a combination of the following reasons:

Pregnancy and childbirth, chronic constipation, heavy and repeated lifting, high impact exercise, being overweight, smoking and menopause.

How do I find my pelvic floor muscles?

This can take time and effort. It's important to get it right!

- Lie or sit with your knees slightly apart
- Tighten and pull up the ring of muscle around your back passage, as if you are trying to stop passing wind. Keep pulling up towards the front, as if you are trying to stop passing urine
- You should feel the muscles lifting up and tightening. If you need to check, use a mirror. Or place your finger in or at the opening of your vagina
- Remember, do not hold your breath or squeeze your buttocks
- If you do hold your breath, try this: Take a gentle breath in through your nose. As you breathe out through your mouth, pull up your pelvic floor muscles.

How do I improve my pelvic floor muscles?

There are two types of exercise – long squeeze and short squeeze.

Long squeeze:

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. Hold for up to 10 seconds. Release and let them fully relax for 10 seconds. Repeat as many as you can, up to 10 times.

At first, you might only be able to hold for a few seconds and repeat only a few times.

Your aim is to eventually hold for 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.

Short squeeze:

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles then immediately let them go again. Repeat as many as you can, up to 10-20 times.

You should do both types of pelvic floor exercises at least 3 times each day.

Build up your exercise routine gradually. If you find it easy to exercise in lying or sitting, try the exercises in standing.

It can take up to 3-6 months to build up and strengthen your weak pelvic floor muscles. You must be patient and work hard!

Useful tips

1. Make good habits. Put a reminder on your phone. Use the NHS Squeezy App. Do your exercises after emptying your bladder while sitting on the toilet.
2. Sort any related problems of constipation, heavy lifting, weight and smoking.
3. You can check you are using the right muscles by trying to slow down or stop the flow of urine mid-stream. **Never do this more than once a month.** This could interfere with normal bladder emptying.
4. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles when you cough, laugh, sneeze or lift.
5. Don't go to the toilet 'just in case.' Wait until your bladder is full.
6. Drink plenty fluids; 1.5 - 2 litres per day/ 6 - 8 mugs. Avoid too many caffeinated drinks eg. coffee, tea, cola.

Remember: Pelvic floor exercises are for life!