

## Pelvic health physiotherapy

# Pelvic floor muscle exercises

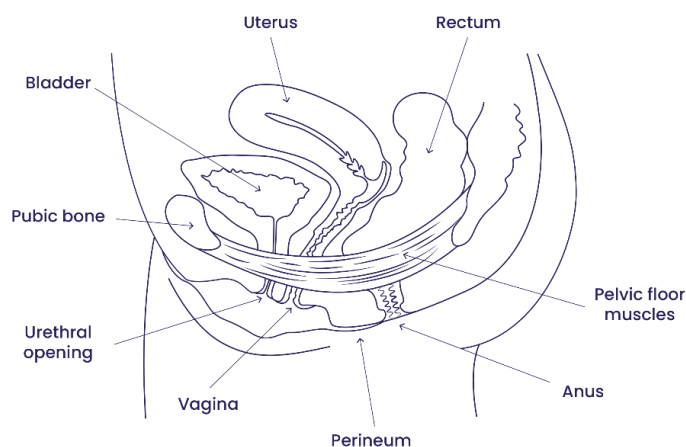
## Introduction

This leaflet provides information and advice about the pelvic floor muscles and how to exercise them. This leaflet is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team but aims to help you understand more about what you have discussed.

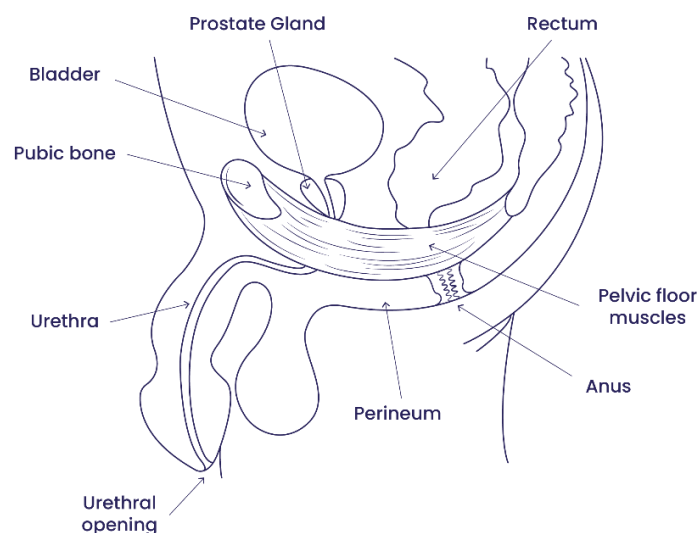
## What are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscle from the coccyx (tailbone) to the pubic bone. They help support the pelvic organs including the bladder and bowel. The muscles are held in place by ligaments and fascia that support the organs. The pelvic floor muscles work to help keep the bladder and bowel openings closed to prevent unwanted leakage (incontinence) and they relax to allow easy bladder and bowel emptying. The muscles actively squeeze when you laugh, cough, lift or sneeze to help prevent any leakage.

## Anatomy of someone assigned female at birth



## Anatomy of someone assigned male at birth



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## How can exercising my pelvic floor muscles help?

Exercising your pelvic floor muscles helps to strengthen them. This contributes to improvements in your symptoms.

### The exercises

Ensure you are in a comfortable position. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine at the same time...

- draw the pelvic floor muscles upwards and forwards from the back passage towards the bladder
- avoid holding your breath, keep breathing normally throughout, you can count out loud to help
- avoid tightening your bottom or legs

**You need to exercise the muscle in two ways:**

**1. Long squeezes** - lift and tighten the pelvic floor muscles. Hold. Then fully relax. Rest. Then repeat.

**hold time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **rest time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **repetitions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Short squeezes** - lift and tighten the pelvic floor muscles. Then let go and fully relax. Repeat.

**Number of repetitions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**You should do these exercises** \_\_\_\_\_ **times a day in a** \_\_\_\_\_ **position.**

You can do these exercises almost anywhere and **anytime but not when passing urine.**

### The Knack

'The Knack' is a **strong and well-timed contraction of the pelvic floor muscles**. It involves the pelvic floor muscles contracting immediately before and during a rise in pressure in the stomach. Activating your pelvic floor muscles before these activities e.g., coughing, sneezing, lifting, carrying, bending - even laughing, can help to support the bladder, reduce leaking and retrain the pelvic floor muscles to work at the correct time.

## How long will it take to see changes?

You are unlikely to notice any improvement for several weeks. You will need to exercise regularly, for at least four months before the muscles gain their full strength. Once your pelvic floor muscles are strong, do not forget them! Keep up with your exercises to reduce the chance of the problem coming back.

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## Remembering to exercise

Try to make the exercises part of a daily routine, doing them at the same time as another activity you already do regularly e.g., brushing your teeth can help. Try the following suggestions:

- put a reminder on your phone
- try one of the pelvic floor exerciser apps available (we suggest the NHS Squeezy app – see QR code)
- during a regular journey in the car, bus or train



## What should I do if I cannot do these exercises?

If you have problems doing the exercises or if you do not understand how to do them, you should ask to see a pelvic health physiotherapist or specialist nurse who can check if you are doing the exercises correctly. They can create a tailored programme for you and your symptoms.

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net**

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

[imperial.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.patient.information@nhs.net)