



& The Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor muscles are one of the most important sets of muscles for women to keep strong at all times in her life. If women were trained to tune up their pelvic floor muscles from childhood many would never suffer problems resulting from weakness of these muscles - problems which many women accept as a normal part of being a woman or a mother .

Pelvic floor muscles form a muscular floor across the pelvis running from back to front and in from the sides.

They are like a hammock holding up organs like the bladder, the uterus (womb) and the intestines, and they actually form part of the walls of the passages that lead from these organs - uretha (front passage), the vagina and the rectum (back passage).

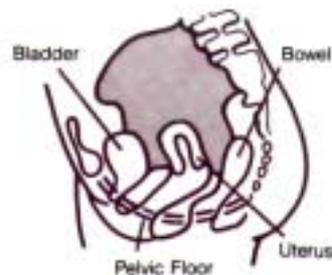


Organs held in good position by strong pelvic floor muscles.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Of poor pelvic floor muscle tone -

- Incontinence (wetting yourself when you cough, sneeze, jog or on the way to the bathroom after getting up).
- Inability to keep tampons in place.
- Vaginal flatus (wind)
- Prolapses into the vagina.



Organs held in poor position by weak pelvic floor muscles.

SELF MANAGEMENT

- Exercise program for pelvic floor strengthening

1. Tighten the muscles around the entrance of the back passage (anus). Imagine that you are tightening the anus as if to prevent passing wind.
2. Tighten the muscles around the entrance of the vagina - imagine you have a tampon in the vagina and it is slipping out - you are tightening the muscles in the vagina to pull it up. To test the strength place your clean fingers (1 or 2) in the vagina and tighten the pelvic floor muscles squeezing the fingers. Feel the tightening and lifting effect.
3. Tighten and pull up the muscles around your front passage (uretha). Imagine that you are tightening the muscles as if to stop yourself urinating. A test of pelvic floor muscle efficiency is to stop the flow or urinemidstream when urinating. This should only be done occasionally as a test - if done regularly it may cause urine to be retained.
4. Tighten and draw in strongly the muscles around the anus, vagina and uretha all at once. Hold for 5 seconds, relax for 15. Repeat this 3 times. Do this regularly throughout each day for the rest of your life

The exercises will not help overnight - it takes time to restore muscle strength.

- If you have problems with these exercises check with a physiotherapist to make sure you are doing them properly.
- If symptoms persist, see your general practitioner.

IMPORTANT

Women who should pay extra attention to their pelvic floor exercises include:

- Pregnant women - before and after childbirth - especially after episiotomy
- Women employed lifting heavy objects
- Women after menopause
- Women who have gained weight

NEW HABITS

- Do your pelvic floor exercises daily - you can do them anywhere without anyone noticing - when driving, doing the dishes, while watching TV, or waiting for a bus.
- Eat a nutritious diet.
- Take regular exercise e.g. walking, swimming
- Ask your general practitioner to check the strength of your pelvic floor muscles when you have your pap smear
- Prepare your pelvic floor muscles for childbirth (relaxation and contraction exercises) and recondition them as soon as possible afterwards. If you have an episiotomy exercising the pelvic floor muscles will speed the healing process



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RESIST

- Ignoring your pelvic floor muscles - you are never too busy to exercise them.
- Becoming overweight.
- Constipation or straining to pass a motion.
- Accepting incontinence (even if it's only a few drops) as part of motherhood or womanhood.
- Being embarrassed about the "lower parts".

ENJOY

- Sport without embarrassment of wet pants
Sex after childbirth and after menopause
- Firmer vagina
- Stronger orgasm
- Quicker healing of episiotomy
- Freedom from pelvic heaviness and dragging

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Contact your local physiotherapist or a branch of the Australian Physiotherapy Association for information about physiotherapists who can provide further assistance.

HEALTH REBATES

A doctor's referral is not required to see a physiotherapist. Appointments may be made direct. Treatment costs may be rebated under all higher table health insurance schemes.

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