

# Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises and Advice for Men



EXCELLENCE  
MATTERS  
(formerly ACPWH)

# Useful resources

## **Websites**

Pelvic Obstetric & Gynaecological Physiotherapy -  
[pogp.csp.org.uk](http://pogp.csp.org.uk)

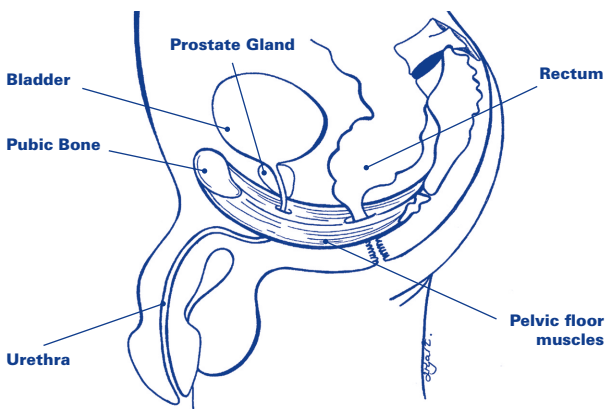
Bladder and Bowel Foundation -  
[www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org)

# Why are my pelvic floor muscles important?

Your pelvic floor muscles are important for bladder and bowel control. These muscles help to keep the bladder and bowel openings closed to prevent leakage of urine, faeces or wind. They also relax to allow the passage of urine and faeces out of the body. Your pelvic floor muscles are also important for sexual function. Good pelvic floor muscles may help to achieve an erection, and may prevent premature ejaculation. Men of all ages can suffer from incontinence or erectile dysfunction. Exercising your pelvic floor muscles can help these problems.

# Where are my pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscle and connective tissue (fascia) stretched across the floor of the pelvis. On the outside this is known as the perineum, the area between the base of the penis and the back passage (anus). The pelvic floor muscles stretch from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx behind, and out to the bones that you sit on. There is an extra ring of muscle around the back passage (anal sphincter) which is important for bowel control. Men also have two other sphincters that help to prevent urine leakage. One is at the base of the bladder and the other just underneath the prostate gland.



# Why do pelvic floor muscles become weak or dysfunctional?

- Prostate surgery - for example a prostatectomy or TURP (transurethral resection of prostate) can affect the pelvic floor and its delicate nerve supply. After surgery men may suffer from stress incontinence (leaking urine on coughing, lifting, rising from a chair etc). Pelvic floor muscle exercises are the first line of treatment for this condition. Other symptoms after surgery include urge incontinence (an urgent need to pass urine, with leaking on the way to the toilet) and/or erectile dysfunction (difficulty achieving and maintaining an erection). Pelvic floor exercises may also help these symptoms
- Poor physical fitness due to a lack of regular exercise or being overweight can lead to poor muscle tone and excess stress on the pelvic floor muscles
- Chronic constipation, prolonged heavy lifting, or a chronic cough can stretch the pelvic floor muscles, their nerve supply and supporting tissues
- Certain neurological conditions - for example multiple sclerosis (MS) or stroke can affect the nerve supply to the muscles
- Injury to the perineum - a direct blow or prolonged pressure e.g. cycling for long periods, may damage the nerves to the pelvic floor muscle

## Symptoms

Symptoms may include;

- urinary leakage during activities such as coughing, laughing, sneezing or during sporting activity
- a sudden feeling that you need to rush to the toilet, or leaking on the way to the toilet
- anal incontinence which is leakage of stool (faeces) or difficulty in controlling wind
- post-micturition dribble (leakage of a few drops of urine after you have finished passing urine)
- erectile dysfunction
- premature ejaculation

# Working your pelvic floor muscles

It is important that you get the right muscles working in the right way. Sit comfortably with your thighs, buttocks and tummy relaxed. To do your exercises, imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine, and at the same time trying to stop yourself from passing wind. You should feel a squeeze and lift inside, along with an upward movement of the scrotum (testicles). Now relax. This is a pelvic floor muscle contraction.

To check your pelvic floor muscles are working correctly:

- standing in front of a mirror - when you do a pelvic floor muscle contraction you should see the base of your penis dip downwards (the tip might move upwards) and your scrotum lift
- you may be able to feel the muscles tighten if you press upwards on the area between your scrotum and back passage (perineum) with your fingers

Make sure that you do not hold your breath while you practise this exercise - breathe gently while you squeeze. Do not tighten your buttocks. You may also feel some gentle tightening in the abdominal muscles below your tummy button. This is normal.

If you are unable to feel a definite tightening in the muscles you should seek professional advice.

## Your pelvic floor muscle exercise programme

You need to practise short squeezes as well as long squeezes.

### **Long squeezes**

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold for several seconds, and then relax for several seconds. How long can you hold?
- Repeat until your muscles get tired. How many times can you repeat your long squeezes?

## Short squeezes

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles for one second, and then relax. Repeat until your muscles get tired. How many times can you repeat your short squeezes?

You should do your pelvic floor muscle exercises at least 3 times each day. You may find it easier to start your programme when you are sitting or lying down. As your muscles improve, aim to do your exercises in other positions such as standing up.

## Improving your pelvic floor muscles

Most men need to aim for 10 long squeezes, up to 10 seconds each, followed by 10 short squeezes. For some this will be too easy, for others this may be too difficult. Start with what you feel is a comfortable length of time for you to squeeze. Gradually increase it over the next few weeks.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during any activity that makes you leak e.g. coughing, sneezing, lifting, rising from sitting, so that this will become an automatic reaction.

After urinating, tighten your pelvic floor muscles strongly to empty the last drops out. This may help to stop "after dribble."

If you are sexually active, tighten your pelvic floor muscles during intercourse to maintain the quality of your erection.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are not a 'quick fix'. It is important that you continue with your exercises even if they do not seem to be helping. If you practise your pelvic floor muscle exercises as above, you should notice an improvement in 3-5 months. Further advice is available from a specialist physiotherapist.

## Remembering to exercise

It is easy to forget your pelvic floor muscle exercises. Make sure your exercises are part of your daily routine - just like brushing your teeth. You should continue with your exercises for the rest of your life.

Here are some suggestions to help you to remember;

- Use coloured stickers or reminder notes around the house or at work
- Do your exercises after you have emptied your bladder. Do not practise stopping your flow of urine mid-stream
- Use the advert break between television programmes
- Set a reminder on your phone

## Preventing problems

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you do anything that may put them under pressure, such as lifting, coughing or sneezing. Being overweight puts extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles. Your symptoms may improve if you lose weight. Straining to empty your bowels (constipation) may also weaken your pelvic floor muscles. If you are often constipated, you may need to seek advice.

Prolonged pressure on your perineum can damage the delicate nerves and blood vessels in the area. If you ride a bicycle for long periods make sure that you raise yourself off the seat at regular intervals to take pressure off your perineum. Consider wearing padded shorts. Special saddles have been designed to help to avoid this problem.

## finding help

If you have any difficulty with the exercises described in this leaflet or find that you are not improving you may need extra help. This may be from a specialist physiotherapist. The Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy group has members who are experts in pelvic floor muscle rehabilitation for men and women.

To find your nearest specialist continence physiotherapist ask your local physiotherapy department or contact:

POGP Administration, Fitwise Management Ltd,  
Blackburn House, Redhouse Road, Seafield,  
Bathgate, West Lothian EH47 7AQ

**T:** 01506 811077 **E:** [info@fitwise.co.uk](mailto:info@fitwise.co.uk)

or visit the POGP website at [pogp.csp.org.uk](http://pogp.csp.org.uk)

**POGP also produce other leaflets, details of which are available on the website.**

