

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE GUIDE

A strong pelvic floor can help:

- Treat and prevent incontinence
- Reduce the risk of prolapse
- Prevent problems during and after pregnancy
- Boost your sex life

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PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Your pelvic floor muscles span the area between the legs, stretching from the pubic bone to the tailbone and from side to side. They help keep important pelvic organs in place and are essential for maintaining good bladder and bowel control.

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Pelvic floor muscles support the bladder, bowel (and uterus in women), they prevent leakage and also play a part in sexual function. Weak pelvic floor muscles can lead to problems like bladder and bowel leakage, pelvic organ prolapse and erectile dysfunction.

The good news is pelvic floor muscle training can strengthen these muscles. If you already have problems with leakage then it's not too late to get help – research shows physiotherapy in the form of pelvic floor muscle training can improve and resolve incontinence.

HOW CAN I FIND THESE MUSCLES?

The first step in performing these exercises is knowing that you've got the right muscles. Try one of the following methods for learning where the muscles are and how to activate them:

1. Imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine, squeeze and lift up around the front passage.
2. Imagine you are trying to hold in wind, squeeze and lift up around the back passage.

If you can't feel your muscles contracting try a different position like lying down or in a seated position. A pelvic floor physio can help you locate these muscles and make sure you're performing the exercises correctly – so don't be afraid to seek help.

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Strengthening your pelvic floor is like working any other muscle group; start off slowly, build up to more repetitions and keep going until you see results! You won't cure leakage after one attempt at a 'squeeze and lift' but keep going and you'll soon see results. Depending on your circumstances it might take 6-12 weeks to see significant results, others notice an improvement straightaway.

1. Sit or lie somewhere comfortable and check that your stomach and bottom muscles are relaxed – make sure you're not holding your breath.
2. Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles as strongly as you can. (You may only feel a subtle movement to begin with).
3. Try and hold the squeeze for 3 - 10 seconds (you may like to begin with just 3 seconds).
4. Rest for 5 – 10 seconds and then repeat the 'squeeze and lift' 5 – 10 times. This is one set.

When you first start out your muscles might be weak, however it's important that you don't 'cheat' by holding your breath or squeezing your inner thighs/bottom. Try to work up to three sets each day. Once you've got the hang of the exercises you might like to link your exercises to another regular habit as a reminder. Try them out when brushing your teeth, having a shower or after toileting.

*Note this is a basic example of how to perform these exercises, it is not customised to your current pelvic floor strength. To progress your exercises or if you are having trouble doing these exercises then please contact a physiotherapist.

Physiotherapy New Zealand acknowledges the Continence and Women's Health Special Interest Group for assisting with information in this leaflet.



IS MY PELVIC FLOOR AT RISK?

Risk factors for developing a weak pelvic floor include:

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Constipation or persistent straining
- Aging
- Obesity
- Menopause/hormonal changes
- High impact sports
- Heavy lifting or very physical work
- Hypermobility joints
- Genetic factors
- Pelvic surgery.

Need more support or information?

A pelvic floor physio can give you help and advice on how to perform these exercises correctly. They can also help you with any of the problems discussed such as incontinence, prolapse or pelvic pain. To find a physio near you please visit www.physiotherapy.org.nz and remember you don't need a GP referral to see a physiotherapist.

This leaflet does not replace the benefits of a full assessment and programme provided by an expert physio or health professional.