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Keep active: a guide to exercises for men with prostate cancer surgery

Physiotherapy Department

Patient Information



NHS

Contents

Introduction	1
Pelvic floor muscle exercises	1
Why should I exercise and what are the benefits?	5
Suggestions for ways to be active	7
Where can I get more information about physical activity and exercise?	10
Contact details	12

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Introduction

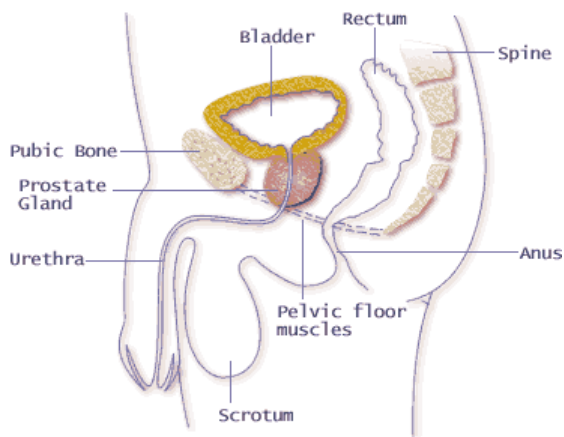
This booklet is specifically for men with prostate cancer who are undergoing surgery. Here, you will find information about exercises for the pelvic floor muscles as well as general advice regarding physical activity.

We provide information about being physically active during and after cancer treatment and give advice on how to safely progress particular exercises. An active lifestyle can play a key role in keeping you healthy and reduce the potential side effects of treatment.

The pelvic floor muscles exercises

Prostate cancer treatment can affect your pelvic floor muscles which, in turn, may influence continence and sexual performance.

The pelvic floor muscles are stretched like a sling from the pubic bone in the front to the tail bone at the back. The pelvic floor supports the internal organs of the abdomen and pelvis. The urethra (bladder outlet) and the rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor muscles. The pelvic floor has an important role in bladder and bowel control in preventing leakage of urine, wind and faeces. The pelvic floor is also thought to play a role in maintaining an erection and sexual sensation.



What can weaken the pelvic floor muscles?

- Some prostate gland surgery
- Radiotherapy to the pelvic area
- Regular heavy lifting
- Continual straining to empty your bowels, usually due to constipation
- A chronic cough, such as smoker's cough, chronic bronchitis or asthma
- Being overweight
- Lack of general fitness
- Ageing
- Smoking.

What are the benefits of pelvic floor exercises?

The main purpose of the exercises is to help prevent urine leaking which can occur after some prostate surgery. Increasing muscle strength of the pelvic floor will also help to reduce discomfort and swelling.

When should I do these exercises?

It is helpful to start these exercises before surgery in order to practise the technique.

Following surgery, start the exercises after your catheter has been removed.

How should I do these exercises?

There are two exercises which will help you strengthen your pelvic floor. You can begin doing them **twice** a day after your catheter is removed. Start doing them lying down. Once you are familiar and confident with the exercises, you should progress by practising them whilst sitting and then standing.

Exercise 1 – Fast Muscle Contractions

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor, slightly apart
- Relax your thighs and buttocks
- Without holding your breath, try to stop yourself from passing wind from your back passage then at the same time try to stop yourself from passing urine
- The movement should feel like a 'squeeze and lift'
- You should see the base of your penis move in and your testicles lift
- Do this as strongly as you can and immediately let go
- Relax
- **Repeat this ten times.**

Exercise 2 – Slow Muscle Contractions

- Perform the 'squeeze and lift' as above
- This time try and hold it for ten seconds
- **Repeat this between five to ten times.**

Many people find that they take a few weeks to be able to complete exercise 2. You should try to practise these exercises at least twice daily and repeat each one between five and 10 times. Quality rather than quantity is the key time as the pelvic floor muscle tires quickly. Where possible, try to make them part of your daily routine.

It will take some time to build up the strength of your pelvic floor muscles – be patient and persist with your exercises daily. It usually takes six to twelve weeks to see any results. You will benefit if you continue the exercises for the rest of your life.

Useful tips

- While walking, tighten your pelvic floor a little
- After passing urine, tighten your pelvic floor strongly to squeeze out the last few drops of urine
- During sexual activity, tighten your pelvic floor to help keep your penis firm
- Tighten your pelvic floor just before and during activities such as:
 - ◇ coughing
 - ◇ sneezing
 - ◇ lifting
 - ◇ rising from sitting
 - ◇ shouting.

Suppressing the urge

Some men have a sudden strong urge to pass urine and feel they have to rush to the toilet. They may leak urine after they feel this urge. Most men can overcome this by using the following tips to help retrain their bladder and to hold more urine.

- Stay calm (panic or rushing can make things worse)
- Try not to hold your breath as this will increase pressure within your stomach and make the situation worse
- Sit down or stand still for one minute until the urge disappears
- Think of something to distract your thoughts and try curling your toes under
- Continue normal activity or visit the toilet once the urge has disappeared
- Some people also find that it helps to drink less caffeine (coffee, tea, cola) and alcohol.

With practice, you can overcome the urge and the need to pass urine so often.

Why should I exercise and what are the benefits?

Studies have shown that physical activity tends to decrease significantly for many people after cancer diagnosis and treatment. This tends to lead to an increase in symptoms such as fatigue, as your body loses fitness.

Overall, this can affect your quality of life by impacting on the things that you enjoy doing. Exercise and physical activity can be one way to help overcome this.

There is also evidence highlighting that regular physical activity may help you to lower the risk of recurrence of prostate cancer.

Being physically active can help lift your mood, giving you a focus to help improve your confidence.

Exercise can help reduce the risk of other problems such as osteoporosis, heart disease, weight issues and joint problems, which are known side effects of some of the cancer treatments themselves.

Exercising in a group or with someone can also be a social activity.

Regular exercise and physical activity can also help you to regain and maintain your strength and stamina after treatment.

How much should I do?

Being physically active means moving your body and using energy at an intensity that makes you warm and slightly out of breath (such as brisk walking). Current thinking is that we should all do moderate exercise or activity five times a week for 30 minutes each time. During and immediately after your treatment, you may feel this is too much for you. However, you can still get benefit if you break the 30 minutes into three lots of 10 minute sessions.

You will have to wait a few weeks after surgery before starting more vigorous exercise, but the suggestions in this booklet will help get you started and find the right balance for you.

Is it safe for me to exercise?

If you are at all unsure whether you should be exercising, ask either your GP or your doctor at the hospital.

Do not exercise if you are unsure or have any of the following symptoms:

- Heart condition or an irregular pulse
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Altered blood cell counts
- Dizziness or blurred vision
- Feeling sick
- Recent or 'new' pain.

Persistent pain must not be ignored; if there is injury, you will have to stop exercising and take medical advice.

It is important to remember to drink plenty of fluids before and after exercising. A healthy diet will help you gain the maximum benefit from exercise and is an important aspect of your recovery. If you are planning to increase your activity levels, you should also increase your energy and protein intake to maintain your weight.

If you have a poor appetite or have experienced recent weight loss, extra information is available in The Royal Marsden booklet, *Eating well when you have cancer*. These are available through The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

We advise you to wear loose, comfortable clothing and supportive shoes, such as trainers, when exercising, so that you can move around easily.

How far should I push myself when I exercise?

Being physically active does not have to mean working out in the gym or going running. Intense physical activity is not the only way to benefit your health. You can achieve health gains when you start to be moderately active. Walking briskly, gardening and playing with your children or grandchildren are ideal activities for moderate exercise and are simple ways to keep active.

It is good to gradually increase the pace you exercise at, so that it becomes more of an effort than a gentle walk. Raising your heart rate enough to make you feel warm and breathe slightly faster, means that you are working at a moderate intensity. As a rough guide, you should be able to manage a conversation without being too breathless during the activity. If you can only say a few words at a time without pausing for breath, then you may be working at a more vigorous intensity.

As already mentioned, the amount of exercise you do will vary between individuals. You will need to find the right balance for you. If you feel very tired after exercising or activity, then you may be doing too much. The next time you exercise or carry out an activity, it may be best either to reduce the amount of exercise or to work less hard.

Suggestions for ways to be active

These are some ideas to increase your activity levels, but there may be other activities that could be of great benefit too.

Walking

Brisk walking is an aerobic activity as it involves moving the body's major muscle groups in a rhythmical motion. This means the heart and lungs need to work harder to deliver oxygen to the working muscles.

Walking is one of the safest physical activities, with little risk of injury and it is inexpensive. It can be easy to include walking

in your daily routine, such as walking to the local shops for the paper rather than using the car. If you enjoy playing golf, try to walk briskly between each hole to raise your heart rate. There are walking groups with guided walks available through local authorities. You should aim to walk with purpose rather than stroll.

Where possible, walk up and down the stairs instead of using a lift or escalator. Stair climbing is an effective workout as it makes your heart beat faster and can increase the strength in your legs and buttocks.

Swimming

Swimming is a great physical activity. It can increase your heart rate and stimulate your muscle activity as an aerobic form of exercise, and the resistance of the water can help with muscle strengthening of your arms and legs.

Try and gradually increase the number of lengths you can swim or the number of lengths you can swim in one go without resting too frequently.

We advise that you avoid swimming while having radiotherapy until any acute soreness of the skin has settled, as the chlorine in the water can irritate your skin.

Gym

You may enjoy attending the gym either on your own or as part of a group. Ensure your gym programme includes aerobic exercise such as using the treadmill, bike or stepper; as well as strengthening or resistance exercises using low weights, with a focus on flexibility and stretching. Ideally you should have a programme designed for you by one of the personal trainers. Personal trainers should have a good understanding of the role of exercise to support people with improving their fitness after illness.

There are number of schemes available through GP surgeries. Your GP may be able to refer you to a gym for a number of specific sessions of exercise.

Cycling

Cycling is another form of aerobic exercise which you may find enjoyable and also provides an effective way to challenge your balance.

Gardening

Gardening can provide a good physical workout. Vigorous pruning, planting, digging, weeding and grass cutting will provide aerobic exercise. Take care to warm up before you start working vigorously in the garden.

Housework

Activities such as vacuuming, dusting, cleaning, washing the floor or car and DIY around the home can provide a challenging physical workout.

Games consoles

You may have access to interactive sport video games through family or friends. A number of games include sporting or physical activities such as tennis, boxing and skiing. Although these may be virtual, they are a great way to be physically active as the movements have a very real effect on your body. They can be fun as well and allow you to monitor your progress.

Strengthening exercises

Recent research has highlighted the benefits of strengthening or 'resistance' exercises for men with prostate cancer. These can help improve muscular strength, your general functional ability and can help to lessen the treatment side effects. Ideally the exercises should be for both upper and lower body muscle groups.

Always feel warm before you start exercising individual muscles. Take a brisk walk for up to 10 minutes first, if you can.

Stretching exercises

It is crucial to always stretch your muscles after a workout to ensure you re-lengthen the muscles and help avoid delayed onset muscle soreness.

Setting achievable goals

- It is important to set yourself a goal or target as a way to motivate yourself to either maintain or increase your physical activity. For instance, it may be something as simple as increasing the time you walk by an extra five minutes, or getting off the bus a couple of stops earlier to walk back home.
- Setting short, realistic goals will help you keep going.
- Think about what might help you keep active, for example, you may be more motivated if you arrange to walk with friends or family or play golf with a colleague. Using a step counter (pedometer) may help you check your progress when walking, or allow you to see the distance you have covered.
- Keeping a diary of your activity is a great way to challenge and reward yourself for your progress.

Where can I get more information about physical activity and exercise?

There are many organisations that can provide you with more information on exercise and physical activity. These include:

Change4life - www.nhs.uk/change4life

This initiative encourages a healthy lifestyle incorporating information and resources related to diet, exercise and healthy living.

Many local councils provide schemes related to exercise, often together with GPs and primary care services. To find out more about what is available in your area, please ask your GP or look at local resources such as your library, council information service and local pharmacies.

Walking for Health – www.walkingforhealth.org.uk

Provides information supporting health walk schemes across England, offering regular short walks over easy terrain with trained walk leaders.

The charities listed below provide further advice and support.

Macmillan Cancer Support – *www.macmillan.org.uk*

Macmillan provides general advice about exercise and specific information related to prostate cancer and its treatments.

Bladder and Bowel Community - *www.bladderandbowel.org*

The community provides information and advice about bladder and bowel problems.

If you have any further questions either about pelvic floor muscle exercises or how to be more physically active, then please contact the Physiotherapy Department.

Contact details

Physiotherapy department, Sutton: 020 8661 3098

Physiotherapy department, Chelsea: 020 7808 2821

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

Notes and questions

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References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre
Freephone: 0800 783 7176
Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.



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