

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

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

Physiotherapy Department

Patient Information



NHS

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Introduction

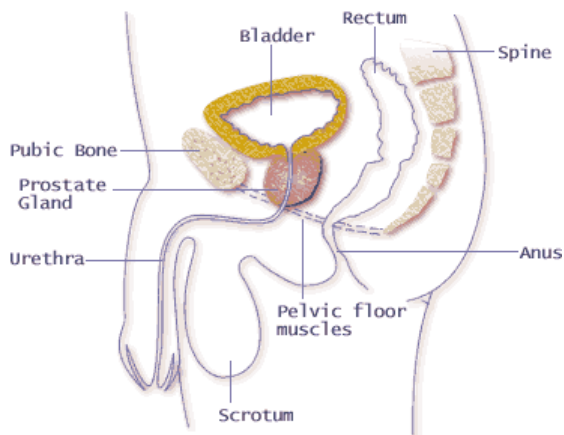
This booklet is specifically for men with prostate cancer who are undergoing surgery. Here, you will find information about exercises for the pelvic floor muscles as well as general advice regarding physical activity.

We also offer suggestions on how to be 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.

Pelvic floor muscles

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

The pelvic floor muscles are a broad muscular support from the tail bone at the back, to the pubic bone in the front. 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 sexual sensation, maintaining an erection and preventing premature ejaculation.



The pelvic floor muscles support the sphincters for the bladder and bowel by wrapping around them in a figure of 8 with deeper muscles looping behind the anus. Then they have to relax to allow urine and faeces out of the body.

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
- Sustained pressure such as cycling
- Injury such as a direct blow
- Medical conditions such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis, stroke.

What are the benefits of pelvic floor exercises?

The main purpose of the exercises is to help prevent urine and bowel leakage 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 important to start these at least six weeks 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 these exercises in sitting or standing. Once you are familiar and confident with the exercises, you should progress by practising them in functional positions, such as walking and other aerobic exercises.

Exercise 1 – Fast Muscle Contractions

- In standing, squeeze the front passage as if you are trying to stop the flow of urine
- As you are doing this, lift the testes up to shorten the penis
- Now gently tighten the muscles around the back passage
- The aim is to ‘squeeze, lift and tighten’ the front and back passage
- Do this as strongly as you can and then immediately let go
- Relax
- **Repeat this 10 times, 3–6 times a day.**

Exercise 2 – Slow Muscle Contractions

- Perform the ‘squeeze, lift and tighten’ as above
- This time try and hold it for 5–10 seconds
- **Repeat this 10 times.**

You should try to practise these exercises 3–6 times daily and repeat each one 10 times. Quality rather than quantity is the key 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 12 weeks to see any results.

It usually takes 3–6 months to fully strengthen the muscles, but seek a referral to a specialist pelvic health physiotherapist if you do not start to feel stronger after six weeks. You will benefit if you continue these exercises for the rest of your life.

While performing the exercises, it is important **not** to:

- Squeeze your buttocks together
- Bring your knees together
- Hold your breath.

Remembering to exercise

- Try to make sure you do these exercises every day so that it becomes part of your daily routine (similarly to brushing your teeth)
- You should continue doing these exercises for the rest of your life
- There is an app you can download called ‘Squeezy’ which will help you exercise effectively (£2.99 at the time of publishing) recommended by the NHS. If you speak to a physiotherapist you can progress onto ‘professional mode’ when they have checked that you are doing the exercises correctly
- Remember to continue doing general exercises (such as walking, pilates, yoga) as this will help you stay fit and maintain a healthy weight.

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, such as counting back from 100 in 3's or names beginning with a letter of the alphabet
- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles and try curling your toes under
- Continue normal activity or visit the toilet once the urge has significantly increased and actually feels full but avoid rushing to the toilet when you have a slight urge or going 'just in case'
- Some people also find that it helps to drink less caffeine (coffee, tea, cola, green tea, hot chocolate) fizzy drinks, drinks with sweeteners such as aspartame and alcohol, particularly beer.

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

Sexual function after surgery

Whether a surgeon performs nerve sparing (unilateral or bilateral), robotic, radical, or minimally invasive surgery, nerves surrounding the prostate, rectum, and bladder will be unable to function as they did before surgery, at least for a time. As a result, the blood flow to the penis can be affected and therefore men will often have erectile dysfunction. Penile rehabilitation is the process of regaining erectile function, erectile length, girth, and hardness. The main goals of penile rehabilitation are to:

- Increase daily oxygen exchange to the penis
- Maintain length and girth of the penis so that full erection size and hardness are possible once the nerves have recovered.

Techniques of penile rehabilitation include:

- Pelvic floor muscles exercises to improve blood flow and oxygenation to the penis
- Gentle stretching and massage of the penis
- Use of PDE5i's medications (Viagra or Cialis)
- Penile vacuum pump to help improve blood flow in and out of the penis (can be used from four weeks post surgery).

If you would like more information on this, you can speak to your doctors or be referred to a pelvic physiotherapist.

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 plays a vital role in building your strength and fitness after treatment, and can help you return to the activities you enjoyed doing before your diagnosis.

There is also evidence highlighting that **regular** physical activity can help with:

- Reducing the risk of the prostate cancer coming back
- Lifting your mood and giving you a sense of self control and confidence
- Reducing the risk of other chronic conditions which can be a side effect of common anti-cancer treatments (including heart disease, osteoporosis, weight issues, joint problems such as arthritis and many more)
- Providing social support (if exercising or being active as part of a group, class or community)
- Improving stamina and maintaining (and even improving) muscle strength 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). The current recommendation 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 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, speak with your GP or doctor at the hospital.

Before starting an exercise programme, if you have or develop any of the following conditions or symptoms, you must consult your GP or medical team. 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*. This is available through Help Centre or The Royal Marsden website.

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, although there are benefits to these structured forms of activity. 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 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, starting with light weights and more repetitions. Over time, you can increase the weight and reduce the repetitions as you gain strength and stamina.

You can consult with a personal trainer who can create an exercise programme tailored to your fitness level and individual needs. Some personal trainers are specifically qualified to work with people with cancer and would be suitable in helping you to achieve any specific goals. You may find more information via: www.canrehabtrust.org

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.

Further information and support

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

CanRehab Trust – www.canrehabtrust.org

Individualised exercise support to people living with and beyond cancer in the UK.

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.

Prostate Cancer UK – *www.prostatecanceruk.org*

PCUK offers information on signs and symptoms of prostate cancer and support if you're newly diagnosed or living with cancer.

Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy (POGP)
– *www.thepogp.co.uk*

POGP provides patient information on the prostate, erectile dysfunction and bladder and bowel dysfunction.

Contact details

If you have any further questions:

Physiotherapy department, Sutton: 020 8661 3098

Physiotherapy department, Chelsea: 020 7808 2821

Alternatively, please contact:

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.

Notes and questions

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

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

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