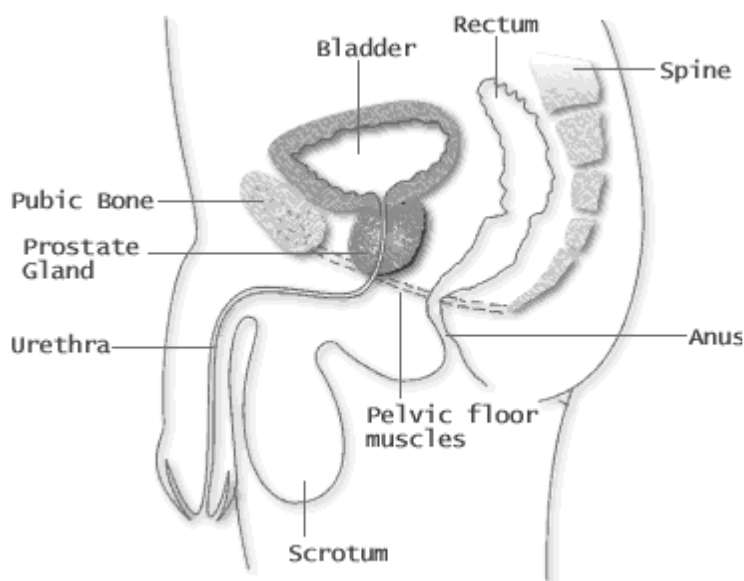


Exercises for your pelvic floor muscles (men)

This factsheet provides information and advice about exercises for your pelvic floor muscles. These exercises should be started immediately **before** any treatment and should continue **after** treatment on a long-term basis. For those having surgery, you should continue these exercises **after** the catheter has been removed.

What are pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscle and connective tissue (fascia) that forms the floor of the pelvis. The pelvic floor muscles stretch from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx/tailbone behind and to the inside walls of the pelvis, forming a broad muscular support across the base of the pelvis. Sphincters/ valves at the base of the bladder and underneath the prostate gland help to prevent urine leakage. The anal sphincter at the base of the back passage maintains bowel control. Importantly, portions of the pelvic floor muscle wrap around these valves to assist them in staying closed.



What can weaken the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor can be weakened by:

- Prostate gland surgery
- Radiotherapy treatment following cancer
- 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
- Smoking
- Ageing
- Injury to the perineum (the area from the base of the penis to the back passage) by a direct blow or prolonged pressure eg. cycling for long periods
- Certain conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, stroke and diabetes may affect the nerve supply to the muscles.

Symptoms

Symptoms of a weak pelvic floor may include:

- Stress urinary incontinence - leakage during activities such as coughing, laughing, sneezing or sports
- Urinary urgency/urinary urge incontinence - a sudden feeling that you need to rush to the toilet that may also result in leakage
- Bowel/anal incontinence - accidental leakage from the bowel of faeces, or difficulty in controlling wind
- Post-micturition dribble - leakage of a few drops of urine after you have finished passing urine
- Erectile dysfunction - not being able to gain or maintain an erection
- Premature ejaculation - ejaculation during sexual activity which happens sooner than expected.

What are the benefits of pelvic floor exercises?

Exercising your pelvic floor muscles following surgery is very important. The exercises and the resulting increased muscle strength will help reduce discomfort and swelling and prevent leakage from your bladder or bowel. The pelvic floor also plays a role in maintaining an erection and improving sexual sensation.

How do I perform pelvic floor exercises?

There are three stages of activating your pelvic floor muscles:

1. Firstly, squeeze the front passage as if you are trying to stop the flow of urine
2. Then lift the testes upwards inside the pelvis to lift, retract and shorten the penis
3. Finally, gently tighten the back passage as if trying to stop wind.



Exercise 1 – Fast contractions

- **Perform a fast squeeze and lift** then release straight away
- Do as many lifts as you can before the muscles start to tire (for example, if you can do 8, then your exercise programme will be 8 fast lifts **after** each set of long lifts).

This exercise helps to train the muscles to react quickly when the sudden stress of coughing, laughing or sneezing puts pressure on your bladder.

Exercise 2 – Slow contractions

- Relax your thigh and buttock muscles
- Slowly squeeze and lift, drawing in the muscles around your front and back passage
- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and at the same time, trying to stop a flow of urine
- Count how many seconds you can comfortably hold on for
- Now see how many times you can repeat this length of lift (for the same amount of time)
- This is the starting point for your exercises (for example, if you can hold on for 5 seconds and can repeat this 6 times before your muscles tire, start by doing 6 lifts held for 5 seconds each)
- Rest for 5 seconds before you start your next squeeze.

How often should I do the exercises?

- Aim to do both exercises 3–6 times a day, working towards 60–120 squeezes a day (60 fast squeezes, 60 slow squeezes)
- Once you are familiar with the exercises, practise in any position you find comfortable
- It is most effective if you spend a short time concentrating on doing your exercises 3 times each day - try to make them part of your daily routine
- **Quality rather than quantity** - a few good exercises will be more beneficial than many half-hearted ones
- It will take some time to build on the strength of your pelvic floor muscles – be patient and persist with your exercises daily
- It usually takes 3-6 months to see any results.

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

- Squeeze your buttocks together
- Bring your knees together
- Lift your pelvic floor muscles on your breath out
- Lift your shoulders, eyebrows or toes upwards.

If you do any of these, you will not tighten your pelvic floor muscles correctly.



Important tips

- Tighten your pelvic floor just before and during activities that make you leak (such as coughing, sneezing, lifting, rising from sitting and walking) so that this becomes an automatic habit
- If you are sexually active, tighten your pelvic floor muscles during sex to maintain the quality of your erection.

Progressing your pelvic floor exercises

- Most men need to aim for up to **10 long squeezes**, held for up to **10 seconds** each, followed by up to **10 fast 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 and gradually increase as you are able.
- Try this in different functional positions such as stride standing, lunges or squats.

Remembering to exercise

- Try to make sure you do these exercises every day so that it becomes part of your daily routine (similar 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 for men* which will help you exercise effectively (£2.99 at the time of publishing)
- Or you can search in the app store for *male pelvic floor* or *Kegels*
- Remember to continue doing general exercises (such as walking, Pilates, Yoga) as this will help you stay fit and maintain a healthy weight.
- If you ride a bicycle for long periods, make sure that you raise yourself off the seat at regular intervals to take the pressure off your perineum. Padded shorts may help and special saddles have been designed to help avoid this problem.

Suppressing the urge

Some men have a sudden strong urge to urinate 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 the 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 the 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
- **Try not** to rush to the toilet when you feel a slight urge
- Continue normal activity or visit the toilet when the urge significantly increases



- Some people also find that it helps to drink less caffeine (coffee, tea, fizzy drinks) and alcohol
- With practice, you can overcome the urge and the need to urinate so often.

What if my bladder is not emptying properly?

This could be due to:

Post-micturition dribble (after dribble): This is leakage of a few drops of urine after you have finished passing urine. This occurs due to weak pelvic floor muscles. The best way to deal with this is by squeezing your pelvic floor muscles after urinating, to empty the last drops of urine. You can also try and use your thumb and index finger to put a downward pressure along your penis (known as 'milking' the urethra) to help squeeze out any residual urine. Repeat this this twice.

Constipation: Straining to empty your bowels (constipation) may also weaken your pelvic floor muscles. If you are often constipated, you may need to seek advice from a health professional/pelvic floor physiotherapist.

Contact details

If you have any questions about the content of this factsheet or would prefer an alternative format, please contact us.

Clinical Nurse Specialist

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Further information and support

For further information, please follow any of the links below:

The Bladder and Bowel Community

Website: www.bladderandbowel.org

Prostate Cancer UK

Website: www.prostatecanceruk.org

Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy (POGP)

Website: www.thepogp.co.uk

