

# Pelvic floor exercises for women

## The Continence Service Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

Do any of these sound like you?

“I always leak urine when I do exercises.”

“I cross my legs when I sneeze.”

“I laughed so much, I wet myself.”

“I like to know where the toilet is everywhere I go.”

“I go to the toilet just in case.”

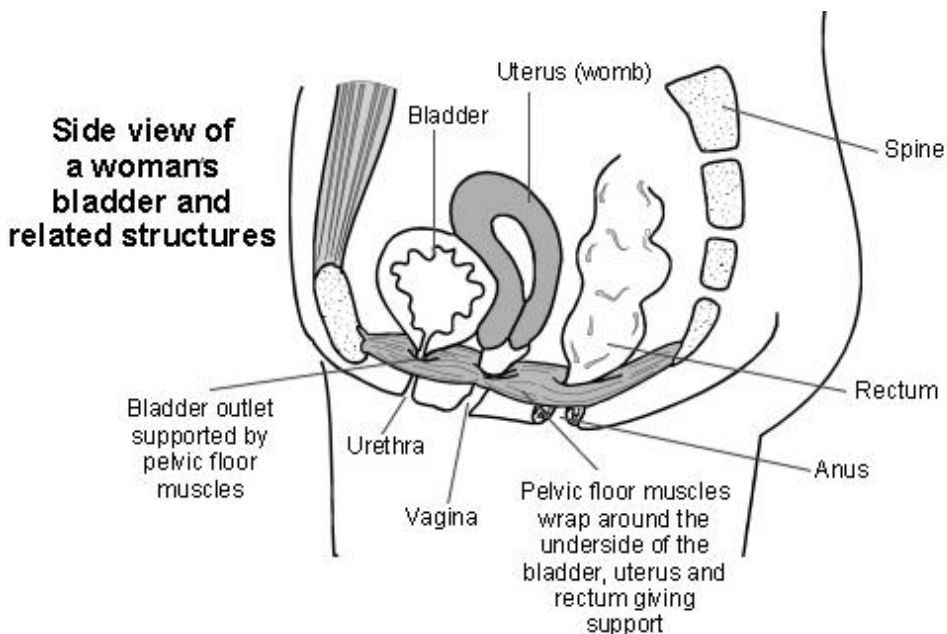
If so, pelvic floor exercises can help. This leaflet tells you what they are and how to do them.

## What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that support the bladder and bowel, and give you control when you pass urine and faeces (see figure 1).

They can become weakened by childbirth, a chronic cough, damaged nerves, being overweight and a general lack of fitness. Weakened muscles can cause leakage of urine during coughing, sneezing, laughing and exercising. This is called stress incontinence.

**Exercising pelvic floor muscles can strengthen them and help to prevent stress incontinence.**



Brayshaw et al. (1994)

Figure 1 shows the female pelvic floor muscles

# Pelvic floor exercises

## Exercise 1

To tighten your pelvic floor muscles, sit or lie in a comfortable position with your knees slightly apart.

Pull up the muscles surrounding your back passage as if you are trying to hold in wind, then pull up towards the front passage as if you are trying to hold the flow of urine. Hold for a count of five, breathing normally all the time.

Release and relax between each pull up for a count of five or more. Repeat this exercise eight times (NICE, 2013).

When you can do this exercise easily, try holding for a longer count, up to a maximum of 10.

## Exercise 2

Try tightening your pelvic floor muscles and then releasing them as quickly as possible five to six times. These muscles contract instantly when you cough, sneeze, laugh etc. Therefore, before you cough, sneeze, laugh or squat to pick something up, try to take a moment to pull these muscles up. This supports and protects the pelvic floor.

## Exercise 3

Imagine that your pelvic floor is like a lift. Tighten the muscles around the back passage and then the front.

Now tighten a little more as if going to the first floor, then to the second floor and then to the third floor.

Now gently come back down each floor – third, second, first to the ground floor again – making sure you are breathing normally all the time. Repeat five to six times slowly.

Try to do these exercises, some fast and some slow, three times a day.

## When should I do the exercises?

Like any muscle, the more the pelvic floor muscles are exercised, the stronger they become. You can carry out these exercises anytime, anywhere. Nobody knows you are doing them. So, find a trigger to help you repeat these exercises, such as every time the phone rings, when you switch on the television, have a drink or when you clean your teeth.

## When will I notice a difference?

You should notice an improvement after three months of regular exercises.

## References

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2013). *Urinary incontinence: The management of urinary incontinence in women NICE guidelines [CG171]*. NICE: London. Available at:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg171>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

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**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/continence-service-community/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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