

Pelvic floor exercises for men

Urology Department

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

Many men experience a variety of problems with their urinary system which can lead to unwanted leakage of urine. Some also have difficulty controlling wind or leakage from the bowels. Often this is due to a weakness of the muscles of the pelvic floor. These muscles are important in preventing these troublesome conditions.

What is the pelvic floor?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle and other tissue. These layers stretch from the coccyx (tail bone) at the back to the pubic bone in front. A man's pelvic floor supports the bladder and bowel. The urethra and the rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor. The urethra is the tube leading from the bladder to the outside of the body (please see figure 1).

The pelvic floor muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control. They are also thought to play a role in maintaining an erection.

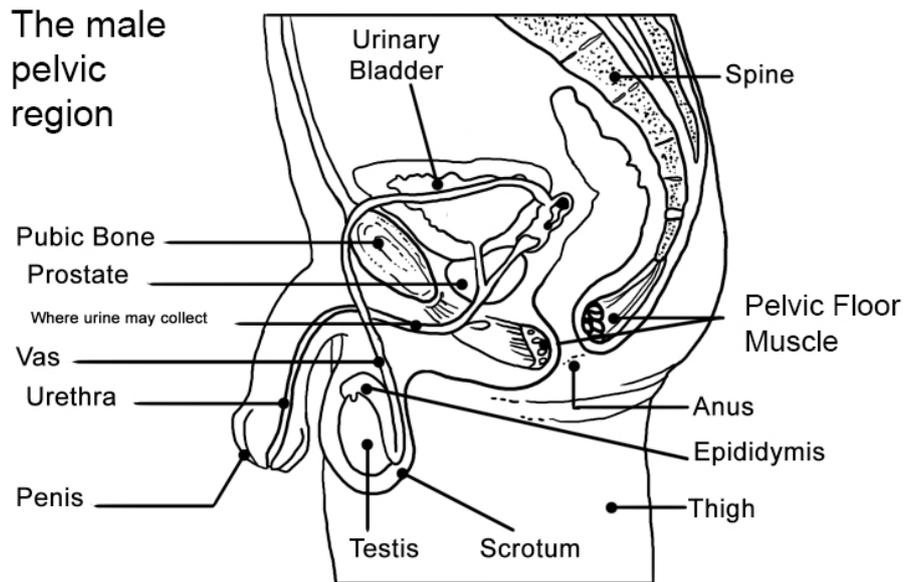


Figure 1 shows the male pelvic floor area

Why do the pelvic floor muscles get weak?

The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by:

- Surgery for an enlarged prostate gland
- Continual straining to empty the bowels, usually due to constipation
- A chronic cough, due to chronic bronchitis or asthma, or a smoker's cough
- Damage to nerves, which can happen after a stroke or spinal injury, or can result from conditions such as multiple sclerosis

It is also thought by many that lack of general fitness and a lot of heavy lifting can weaken the pelvic floor.

What are pelvic floor exercises?

You can improve control of your bladder and bowel by doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These exercises may also be useful in conjunction with a bladder retraining programme. This programme is aimed at improving bladder control in people who experience an urgent need to pass urine frequently and who may not always 'make it in time'.

Please note that people who have weak pelvic floor muscles due to nerve damage will be given advice by the specialists who are looking after their health care.

How do I identify my pelvic floor muscles?

The first thing to do is to correctly identify the muscles which need to be exercised.

1. Sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen (tummy) relaxed.
2. Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind. You should be able to feel the muscle move. You need to concentrate on using the correct muscles; do not tighten your buttocks, thighs or tummy muscles.
3. In order to contract your pelvic floor muscles, it may help you to imagine you are passing urine, trying to stop the flow mid-stream and then starting again. (**Important:** do not try to stop the stream when you are actually passing urine, as this may cause problems with bladder emptying).

If your technique is correct, each time that you tighten your pelvic floor muscles you may feel the base of your penis lift up slightly towards your abdomen. This is known as the squeeze and lift action.

If you are unable to feel the definite squeeze and lift action of your pelvic floor muscles, speak to one of the urology specialist nurses. They will refer you to a specialist in this area to help you to get your pelvic floor muscles working correctly. Even men with very weak pelvic floor muscles can learn how to do these exercises, with help from a physiotherapist or continence adviser who has specialist expertise in this area.

How do I do the pelvic floor exercises?

Now that you can feel the muscles working, you can start to exercise them. Your pelvic floor muscles need to:

- have stamina (not tire quickly) – see exercise one and
- be able to react quickly to sudden stresses such as coughing, laughing or exercise that puts pressure on the bladder – see exercise two

These exercises can be performed in a standing, sitting or lying position with your knees slightly apart.

Exercise one

Tighten and pull up your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can, and try to hold this contraction for five seconds. Release slowly and relax for five seconds – you should have a definite sensation of ‘letting go’.

Practise this and build up your strength until you can do 10 slow contractions at a time, each with a 10 second hold.

Exercise two

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as before but this time hold for just one second, before releasing. Try to achieve a strong muscle tightening with up to 10 quick contractions one after the other.

Aim to do a set of 10 of exercise one followed by a set of 10 of exercise two, three to four times each day.

Important: while doing your exercises, **do not** hold your breath or push down instead of squeezing and lifting up.

It takes time for exercises to strengthen muscles. You are unlikely to notice an improvement for several weeks so you will need to be persistent. You will need to exercise regularly for at least three months before your muscles are up to full strength.

Make your exercises a daily routine.

Once you have learnt this technique, you should do your exercises regularly at times when you can give them your full concentration. It is often helpful to have regular times during the day when you do your exercises, such as after going to the toilet, when making a drink etc. This can make it easier to remember to do the exercises.

You should also practise these exercises when getting up from a chair, coughing or lifting – some men find that this helps them to regain bladder control.

Remember: good results take time to achieve. You will probably not notice an improvement for several weeks and it will be a few months before you achieve your maximum performance.

When you have recovered control of your bladder, you should continue to practise these exercises twice a day for life, to maintain the strength of your pelvic floor.

Can I find out more?

If you need more advice about continence issues, please contact:

Dudley Continence Service

Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre

Venture Way

Brierley Hill

DY5 1RU

01384 321517 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Contact information

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

The urology nurse specialists on 01384 456111 ext. 2873 (8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456 111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/urology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email 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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