

Free helpline
1800 33 00 66 (tel:1800 33 00 66)

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Pelvic floor

How can I find my pelvic floor muscles?

The first step in performing pelvic floor muscle exercises is to identify the correct muscles. There are several ways to identify them.

Method 1 - Stopping the flow

When you go to the toilet, try to stop or slow the flow of urine midway through emptying your bladder. If you are able to do this you are squeezing the correct muscles. Do not do this repetitively. This is not an exercise, but a way to identify the correct muscles.

Method 2 - Visualisation

Stand in front of the mirror (with no clothes on) and tighten your pelvic floor muscles. If you are tightening the right muscles, you should see the base of the penis draw in and scrotum lift up. The back passage will tighten too but it is not the focus of the exercise. When you relax your muscles you should feel a sensation of 'letting go'.

Getting the technique right

Correct technique is very important when doing pelvic floor muscle exercises. You should feel a 'lift and a squeeze' inside your pelvis. The lower abdomen may flatten slightly, but try to keep everything above the belly button relaxed, and breathe normally. A continence physiotherapist, continence nurse advisor or urology nurse can help if you have trouble identifying your pelvic floor muscles.

Exercising your pelvic floor muscles

Once you master the art of contracting your pelvic floor muscles, try holding the inward squeeze for longer (up to 10 seconds) before relaxing. If you feel comfortable doing this, repeat it up to 10 times. This can be done three times a day. Make sure you continue to breathe normally while you squeeze in.

You can do the exercise lying down, sitting or standing with your legs apart, but make sure your thighs, bottom and stomach muscles are relaxed.

Many men find it difficult to remember to do their pelvic floor exercises. Linking the exercises to a regular activity such as meal times or brushing your teeth is a good way to incorporate them into your daily routine.

Important information for men who have undergone prostate surgery

Performing pelvic floor muscle exercises after prostate surgery is vital to your recovery as it is these muscles that help you control your bladder.

Doing pelvic floor muscle exercises after surgery (whilst a urinary catheter is in place) can irritate the bladder and cause discomfort. It is therefore recommended that you do not do any exercises during this time. However, once the catheter is removed you may start the pelvic floor exercises straight away.

For more information on this topic you can order a copy of Continence and prostate: a guide for men undergoing prostate surgery (</resources.php/01tA0000001b1c51AA/continence-and-prostate-a-guide-for-men-undergoing-prostate-surgery>) from our resources section.

When to seek professional help

Seek professional help when you have bladder or bowel control problems with symptoms such as:

- needing to urgently or frequently go to the toilet to pass urine or bowel motions
- accidental leakage of urine, bowel motions or wind
- difficulty emptying your bladder or bowel
- pain in the bladder, bowel or in your back near the pelvic floor area when exercising the pelvic floor or during intercourse.

These problems may not necessarily be linked to weak pelvic floor muscles and should be properly assessed.

Like all exercises, pelvic floor exercises are most effective when individually tailored and monitored. The exercises described are only a guide and may not help if done incorrectly or if the training is inappropriate.

Incontinence can have many causes and should be individually assessed before starting a pelvic floor muscle training program. Tightening or strengthening pelvic floor muscles may not be the most appropriate treatment so speak to a health professional if you have persistent problems with your bladder or bowel.

Health professionals

Continence or pelvic floor physiotherapists specialise in pelvic floor muscle exercises. They can assess your pelvic floor function and tailor an exercise program to meet your specific needs. They can also prescribe other treatment options such as biofeedback and discuss relevant lifestyle factors with you.

For a list of continence or pelvic floor physiotherapists, visit the Australian Physiotherapy Association (<http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/APAWCM/Controls/FindaPhysio.aspx>) or call the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.