

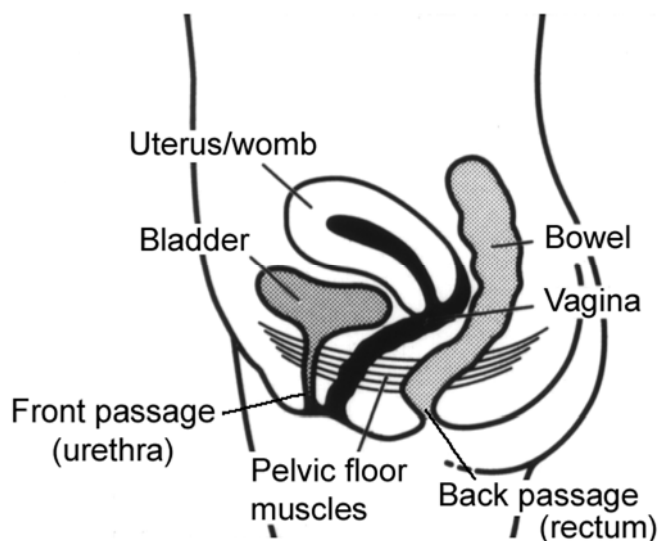
Pelvic floor exercises & advice following hysterectomy, repair and other gynaecology surgery

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

Your pelvic floor muscles

Your pelvic floor muscles are hammock-shaped and line the base of your pelvis. They support the abdominal and pelvic organs when you stand. Through these muscles pass the rectum, vagina and urethra.



Why exercise?

The pelvic floor muscles encircle important openings and hold them securely closed when coughing, sneezing, jogging, etc. It is important therefore that they are efficient. Like all muscles, if not exercised regularly they will weaken and become less effective, possibly resulting in incontinence or a prolapse.

Pregnancy, the natural aging process and gynaecological surgery will put added stress on these muscles. After surgery patients are encouraged to perform pelvic floor muscle exercises to reduce discomfort and swelling, and to build up strength and support. To maintain improved performance throughout life, continue to exercise regularly.

In which position should I exercise?

It is easiest to start in the lying or sitting position. Exercises can also be practised whilst standing, enabling you to practise at any time, anywhere.

If you have a catheter it may be more comfortable to wait until it is removed and you are passing urine normally before starting pelvic floor exercises.

How?

Tighten the muscles around the back passage and draw them up, as if trying to stop passing wind. At the same time tighten the muscles around the front passage and draw them up as if trying to stop passing water. As you squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles keep the buttocks and tummy muscles relaxed and do not hold your breath.

- **Exercise 1:** Hold the squeeze for a few seconds then relax for a few seconds. Gradually increase the hold time and the number that you do until you can hold the squeeze for up to 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.
- **Exercise 2:** Tighten the pelvic floor muscles quickly and strongly and then relax quickly (twitching action). Do this up to 10 times each session.

How often?

Practice these exercises at least three or four times a day.

Always try to use your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, laugh, sneeze or lift an object.

Associate doing the exercises with some of your everyday activities, such as washing up, ironing, watching television or answering the telephone.

Carry out the exercises on a daily basis to maintain performance for life. Improvement can be slow, so don't be discouraged.

Things to avoid

- **Being overweight** – This creates extra load for the pelvic floor.
- **Constipation** – Straining stretches the pelvic floor muscles.
- **Strenuous heavy lifting** – Places extra pressure on the pelvic floor, as does repeated lifting.
- **Smoking** – 'Smoker's cough' strains the pelvic floor.
- **Excess tea/coffee/alcohol** – These are diuretics (making you pass water more often).

- **Drinking too little** – Drink at least two pints of fluid daily. Less fluid intake does not mean less leakage.
- **Sudden movements** – Try to contract your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing, jumping, jogging etc.
- **Habit-forming** – Try not to empty your bladder too frequently (less than two-hourly) or you may reduce its capacity.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail: pals@ndevon.swest.nhs.uk You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple or alternatively it may be possible for us to arrange an appointment in your area.

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