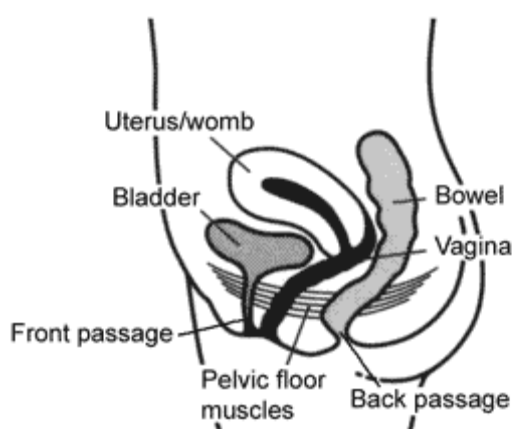


## The pelvic floor muscles (women)

### 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.



### What and where are they?

The pelvic floor muscles are at the bottom of your pelvis. They attach to the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx (tail bone) at the back.

### What does the pelvic floor do?

The muscles of the pelvic floor work like a hammock, to support the pelvic organs (bladder, womb and bowel). The pelvic floor muscles also help close the outlets from the bladder and bowel, keeping you clean and dry.

Strong pelvic floor muscles can also help increase sexual enjoyment.

### Why do I need to exercise my pelvic floor?

All muscles need to be exercised to stay strong. The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened in several ways, e.g.

- Childbirth and pregnancy
- Excess weight
- Chest problems causing coughs

- Long term constipation
- Ageing

Strengthening the pelvic floor can improve bladder and bowel control, and also support the pelvic organs, helping to prevent prolapse.

## How do I find my pelvic floor?

Sit comfortably on a firm chair and try to keep breathing normally. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind by pulling up the back passage. Try to avoid clenching your buttock muscles.

Now imagine that you are pulling your back passage up inside towards your navel (tummy button) as though it is in a lift.

## Exercises

### To strengthen the muscles

Hold at the top of the 'lift' for up to 10 seconds. Release and rest for 5 seconds. Try to breathe normally. You may feel your tummy muscles tighten, which is fine.

Repeat as many times as you can up to 10 times.

### To make the muscles work quickly, when you need them

Pull the muscles in quickly and let go again. Repeat 10 times.

This is your set of exercises, which you should practice 3 to 4 times a day.

### Remember:

Set aside times to do the exercises when you are not busy with something else. If you are washing up or driving, you can't concentrate properly.

A full set must be done each time, to work well.

When you can do the exercises well in sitting, try doing them in standing.

### To improve the tone of the muscles

Pull in the same muscles, but only half way up the lift. Hold for as long as you can e.g. while waiting for the kettle to boil, or traffic lights to change to green, or whenever you walk from your front door to the car.

This can be done as often through the day as you like.

## Using the muscles

When you are going to do something which causes pressure in your abdomen, e.g. coughing or lifting, it is important to get into a habit of pulling in your pelvic floor muscles immediately before and try to hold them until you stop.

## Other things you can do to help

- Lose weight if you need to (check with your GP for advice)
- Avoid constipation
- Avoid heavy lifting where possible

Increasing your general fitness is important, eg cycling, walking and swimming, but it is advisable to avoid high impact exercises, such as trampolining. Also, sit ups are best avoided.

## Final thought

It takes 3 to 6 months to strengthen pelvic floor muscles with regular training, don't be disheartened if improvement is slow, and don't give up!

Just like any other muscles in the body, the pelvic floor muscles will go weak again if not exercised regularly. Therefore these exercises must become as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth!

### **Bladder and Bowel Care Service**

East Devon – Franklyn House, St Thomas, Exeter  
Tel: 01392 208478

South Devon – Newton Abbot Hospital  
Tel: 01626 324685

North and Mid Devon – Crown Yealm House, South Molton  
Tel: 01392 675336

### **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 [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple. Alternatively, it may be possible for us to arrange an appointment in your area.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of the staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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