

Activating your pelvic floor – the importance of breathing

Being able to activate your pelvic floor muscles while controlling your breathing is an important skill. Ideally you will use diaphragmatic breathing which keeps your chest relaxed, with only your abdominal wall moving gently in as your diaphragm descends (inhale) and moves out as your diaphragm rises (exhale).

Relax your jaw and let your breath flow gently in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue this breathing during the exercises on this sheet, even while you are activating your pelvic floor. This is vital for your continence.

At the end of each repetition, always relax for twice as long as you have held the active position.



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Incontinence

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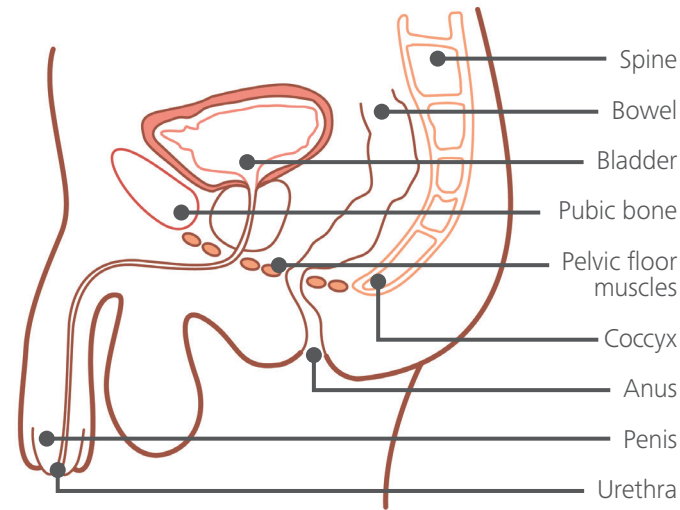
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How to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

Pelvic floor training can help to reduce incontinence as you learn to activate the right muscles to control urine loss; then exercising them daily to improve strength and endurance.

Learning the exercises can be challenging, like any new skill; so find a quiet comfortable space free from distractions where you can concentrate on the movements as you do the exercises correctly.

- Exercise in a well-ventilated area wearing comfortable, loose clothing
- Use a mat for the floor exercises
- Empty your bladder first
- Repeat each exercise 3 to 5 times. Hold the position for the duration instructed
- Every exercise has a starting position and an active position. Once you are confident you are activating the right muscles, you can extend your holding times in the active position for 5, 7 or 10 seconds. As you improve you may hold even longer
- None of these exercises should cause pain
- Focus on the skill and execution of each exercise, rather than the quantity
- Like any training programme, improvement comes with persistence and staying on the programme. Results may take weeks or months
- Finally, if you are unsure how to do these correctly, or you are disappointed with your results, seek help from your urologist or pelvic health physiotherapist



The after-dribble

A very common and embarrassing problem is a small urine leak from the urethra after leaving the toilet. This can result in a damp patch, especially noticeable on light coloured trousers.

This can be prevented by either tightening the pelvic floor muscles after fully emptying the bladder, or by placing your hand behind the scrotum and applying firm pressure upwards and slightly forward. Any urine left in the urethra will be expelled into the urinal or toilet.

About your pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor muscles extend from the pubic bone to the base of the spine (see diagram).

There are two openings in the pelvic floor, one for the urethra, sometimes called the 'water pipe' (the passageway that carries urine from the bladder), and one through which the bowel empties.

The pelvic floor muscles:

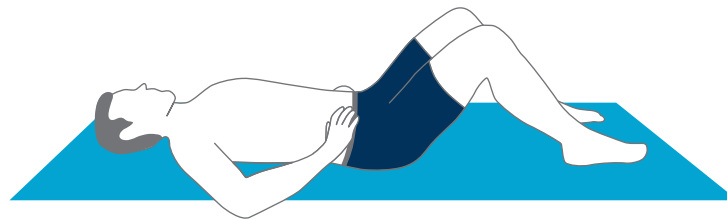
- ▶ Support the lower abdomen organs, especially the bladder and bowel
- ▶ Assist normal bladder and bowel function and prevent leakage (incontinence)
- ▶ Contribute to sexual function





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Pelvic floor exercises for men



1

Breathing

Starting position:

Lie on your back, with knees bent and hands resting on the sides of your belly.

Activation:

- Gently draw up your urinary control muscles as if you are trying to stop the flow of urine or drawing your penis toward your body.
- Maintain the internal muscle tension as you breathe in and then out, your abdominal wall rising while breathing in, and falling while breathing out.
- Relax your pelvic floor at the end of the exhale, then repeat.

With training, you can extend the pelvic floor tightening across 2 or more breaths, before relaxing on an exhale.

2

Bridge

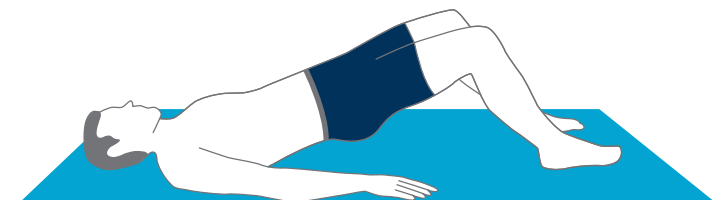
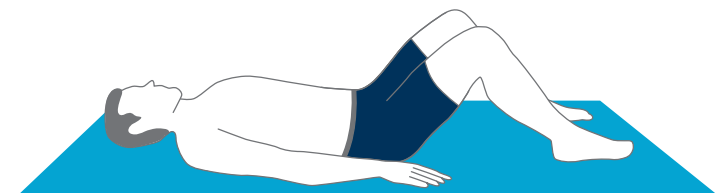
Starting position:

Lie on your back, knees bent. Place your hands freely alongside your body with palms facing down.

Activation:

- As in exercise 1, draw in your pelvic floor muscles as if to shorten your penis – slow and gentle so as not to engage or hollow your abdominal muscles.
- Maintain this tension during the hip bridge.
- Raise your pelvis/hips off the floor as high as you are able.
- Pause at the top of the movement and then lower.
- Release the pelvic floor tension when you are flat on the floor again.
- Repeat and hold for longer as you improve your control of the pelvic floor.

Remember to breathe during the bridging movement without relaxing your pelvic floor tension.



3

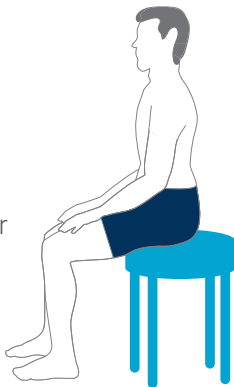
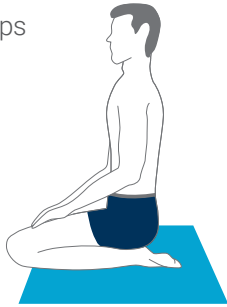
Sitting on heels

Starting position:

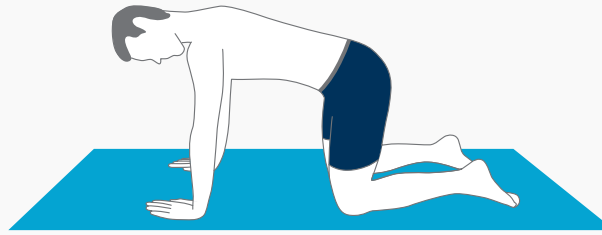
Kneel on the floor and place a cushion or pillow on your lower calf muscles so you can sit comfortably on it. Sit tall with your chest lifted and head upright, but not tilted back.

Activation:

- As in exercise 1, draw in your pelvic floor muscles as if to shorten your penis – slow and gentle so as not to engage or hollow your abdominal muscles.
- Maintain the pelvic floor tension as you shift your hips and pelvis up and forward, rising from the cushion.
- Continue upwards until your hips are above your knees and thighs vertically.
- Pause at the top, check your pelvic floor is still active, then lower slowly back onto the cushion.
- Once down, relax your pelvic floor, take a moment and repeat.
- The thinner the cushion, the harder this exercise becomes.



If you can't kneel comfortably on the floor, you can do this exercise on a chair, sitting near the front edge and rising to standing.



4

Cat pose

Starting position:

Kneel on all fours. Place your palms on the floor shoulder-width apart, and knees hip-width apart. Keep your arms straight and head in line with the body.

Activation:

- While inhaling, round your back up to the ceiling while also engaging your pelvic floor muscles around the urethra.
- Hold that position for 3, 5, 7 and then 10 seconds, maintaining the pelvic floor tension. If you lose the pelvic floor sensation the movement is complete.
- While exhaling, relax and allow your back to return to the straight starting position. Avoid leaning your head backwards.

5

Half squat

Starting position:

Stand with your legs hip-width apart and bend your knees slightly. Either place your hands on your hips with the elbows pointing outward; or rest your hands on your thighs, above your knees.

Activation:

- As in exercise 1, draw in your pelvic floor muscles as if to shorten your penis – slow and gentle so as not to engage or hollow your abdominal muscles.
- Move your hips backwards as you bend your knees into a half squat position.
- Keep your knees above your feet, don't let them get in front.
- Lower your hips as far as you feel comfortable and balanced AND can maintain your pelvic floor tension.
- Straighten your legs and return to the upright starting position, then relax your pelvic floor.
- Repeat this exercise slowly and with control for longer holds (pause at the bottom) and more repetitions.

