

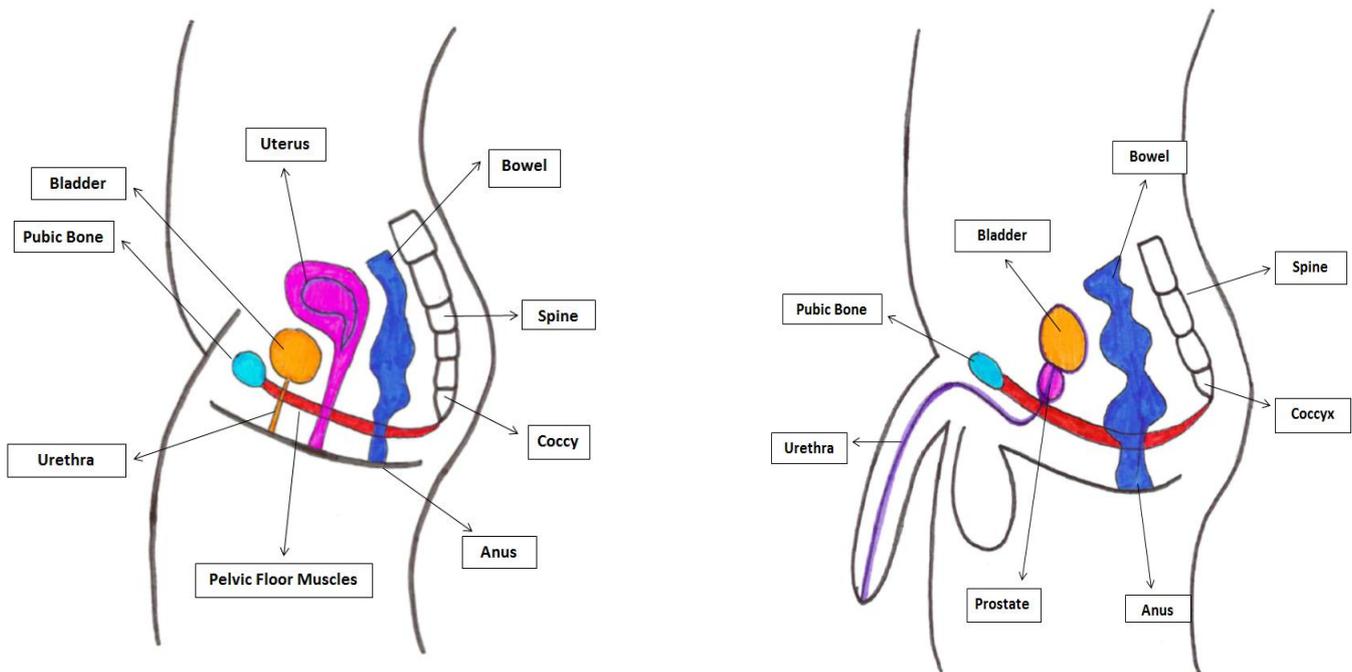
# Chronic cough and urinary incontinence

This leaflet offers more information about chronic cough and urinary incontinence. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

## What is urinary incontinence caused by chronic cough and why have I got it?

Men and women with chronic chest conditions such as bronchiectasis, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) often suffer with weak pelvic floor muscles as a result of repetitive coughing. A chronic cough is a risk factor for having weak pelvic floor muscles and up to 66% of patients with a chronic cough have this problem.

The pelvic floor is a large group of muscles which pass from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx (tail bone) behind, forming a bowl shape. They support the bladder, the bowel and the uterus in women.



The pelvic floor also supports the base of the pelvis when standing and plays a role in sexual function during intercourse.

The pelvic floor is kept under slight tension to prevent leakage and control passing of urine, gas or bowel motions.

When you cough, your abdominal muscles contract and put pressure on your bladder and pelvic floor muscles. Your pelvic floor muscles should contract during each cough or sneeze to prevent leakage. If your pelvic floor muscles are weak or you have intense periods of coughing (especially during disease flare-ups), you may notice leakage of urine, gas or bowel motions.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Common symptoms of weak pelvic floor muscles include:

- Leaking urine when coughing, sneezing, laughing and during exercise
- A sudden and urgent need to pass urine
- Leakage of stool from the back passage
- Reduced satisfaction during intercourse
- Erectile dysfunction.

## What treatments are available?

Doing regular pelvic floor exercises can help to reduce or stop incontinence.

Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can also help.

## What happens if I do not get treatment?

It can be embarrassing to have problems with leakage, but you are not alone. If you leave the problem untreated it can get worse, so talk to your physiotherapist or respiratory nurse for advice.

If you need further help and support ask your GP to refer you to Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapy at St George's Hospital.

## Is there anything I can do to help myself?

### Airway clearance and coughing

You should not avoid coughing as this could lead to a build-up of sputum in your lungs. It is important that urinary leakage does not stop you clearing your chest effectively.

Changing your airway clearance technique may help reduce or stop leakage. Good posture during airway clearance is important and keeping a good upright position will help your pelvic floor to work at its best. You can also squeeze or tighten your pelvic floor just before you cough to help prevent leakage.

### Exercising your pelvic floor muscles

While sitting or lying, slowly tighten the muscles around your anus and vagina, lifting up and in as if trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine.

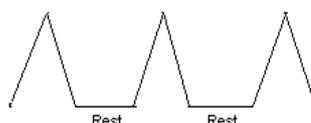
Try to only squeeze these muscles, avoiding tightening your buttocks, squeezing your legs or holding your breath.

Do these exercises three – six times a day.

**Exercise 1:** To build up the endurance of these muscles, hold this contraction for as many seconds as you can and then fully relax. Relax for as long as you have squeezed. Repeat 10 times. Try to build up to 10 seconds x 10.



**Exercise 2:** The muscles need to be able to work quickly so that they can react to stresses such as coughing, sneezing or running. Imagine the muscles are an elevator. Lift up the muscles to the top floor as quickly as you can. Relax fully. Repeat up to 20 times.



## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about chronic coughing and urinary incontinence, please contact your doctor, respiratory nurse or physiotherapist and ask about women's health.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

