

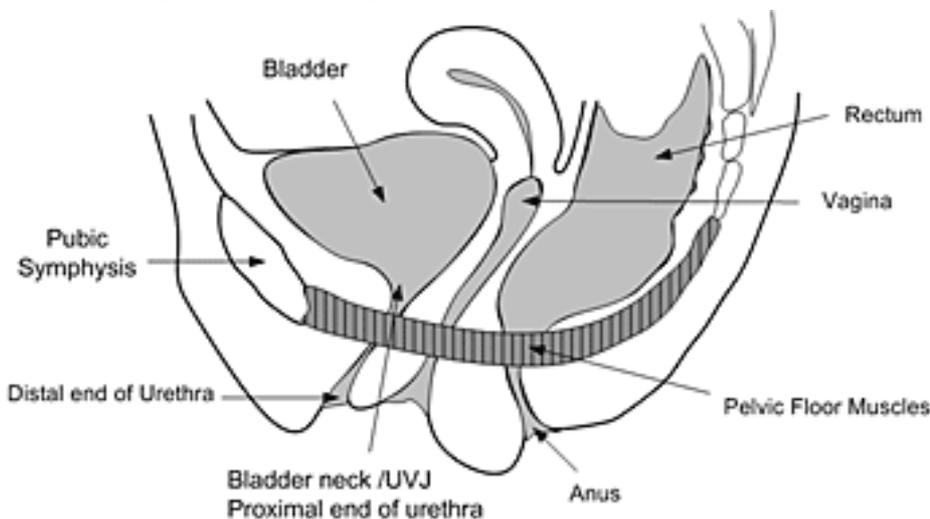
Pelvic floor exercises for women

This leaflet offers more information about pelvic floor exercise for women. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What are pelvic floor muscles?

Your pelvic floor muscles are a sling of muscles which sit between your legs and go from your tail bone at the back to your pubic bone, at the front.

They form the 'floor' of your pelvis and your urethra (urine tube), vagina (birth canal) and rectum (back passage) pass through the muscle.



Your pelvic floor muscles help to:

- 1) support your pelvic and abdominal organs
- 2) maintain bladder and bowel continence
- 3) enhance sexual function.

During pregnancy and birth, the pelvic floor muscles help rotate the baby into the correct birth position and support the weight of your growing uterus. The pelvic floor may become weakened in pregnancy due to the following factors:

- hormone changes
- increasing pressure on your pelvic floor muscles as your baby grows
- being overweight
- lack of general fitness
- after labour.

You should do pelvic floor exercises every day, whether you are having bladder or bowel problems or not.

Pelvic floor exercises can help:

- symptoms of stress incontinence (leaking urine during exercise or when coughing, sneezing or lifting)

- symptoms of urgency (so you can hold on for longer)
- in pregnancy to support your growing baby and improve your recovery after giving birth
- reduce any symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse in the menopause.

How do I exercise my pelvic floor muscles?

- Sit or lie comfortably and relax the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen
- Tighten the muscles around your back passage as if you are trying to stop passing wind
- At the same time, imagine you are trying to stop the flow of urine in mid-stream.

You should feel a 'squeeze and lift'.

It is important to do this **without**:

- tightening your buttocks
- holding your breath
- squeezing your legs together.

You may feel your deep stomach muscles working at the same time as your pelvic floor – this is normal as these muscles all work together to help your core stability.

Fast and slow squeezes

Pelvic floor muscles are made of fast and slow twitch muscle fibres – they need to be able to activate quickly and strongly, and also have good endurance to support the weight of your pelvic organs throughout the day.

To do fast squeezes, quickly tighten and lift the muscles around your back and front passage as firmly as you can and release immediately.

To do longer holds, slowly tighten and lift the muscles around your back and front passage. Hold for as long as you can (up to 10 seconds), then let go and rest for five seconds. You should feel a definite sensation of 'letting go'. If this doesn't happen, reduce the time you are holding for.

How do I know I'm working the right muscles?

You can test if you are working the right muscles in two ways:

- 1) When you are passing urine, try to stop the flow in mid-stream and then start again. Only do this every now and then as it can interfere with emptying your bladder normally.
- 2) Place one finger about one inch into your vagina to feel the lifting and squeezing action. You should not feel a 'pushing down' feeling.

How many exercises should I do and how often?

You need to do pelvic floor exercises at least three times a day to make a difference to the muscles.

A good starting point is to repeat 10 fast and 10 long exercises three times a day. The more you do them, the stronger your muscles will become.

You can do these exercises in any position – start by doing them lying down and then progress to doing them sitting, standing and walking. Use a trigger to remind you to do them – perhaps while you are waiting for the kettle to boil or when you are on the bus or train.

Is there anything else I can do to help myself?

Don't forget to use your pelvic floor when you most need it – squeeze every time you cough, sneeze, lift or when you are holding on.

If you are unsure, ask your women's health physiotherapist.

Useful sources of information

<http://pogp.csp.org.uk/information-patients>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your pelvic girdle pain, please contact your physiotherapist on 020 8487 6022 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm). Alternatively contact us by email: WACCG.physiotherapyoutpatients@nhs.net

We are also on Twitter: @QMMSKphysio

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit 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 9.30am and 4.30pm, 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

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

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



Reference: PHY_PFE_01 **Published:** November 2017 **Review date:** November 2019