

Pelvic Floor Muscle Overactivity

This leaflet offers more information about pelvic floor muscle tightness and what you can do about it. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is pelvic floor muscle tension and why have I got it?

Pelvic floor muscles can become tight or go into spasm from overactivity like any other muscle.

Overactive pelvic floor muscles can have increased tension and/or can't fully relax, a bit like having very tight and painful neck muscles that won't relax.

Having a strong pelvic floor is important to support your pelvic organs and control your continence and bowel movements.

It's also important that you can relax these muscles so that you can have sex comfortably and empty your bladder and bowel correctly.

If your pelvic floor muscles are both tight and weak, you should treat the tension before the weakness. Once your muscles have reached a normal resting tone and you can fully relax them, we will see how strong they are and prescribe you with pelvic floor strengthening exercises if these might help you.

What causes pelvic floor muscle overactivity?

- Overloading the pelvic floor muscles with too much pelvic floor exercise and not enough relaxation
- Overloading the pelvic floor by doing intense abdominal core exercises or holding in your stomach
- Pelvic surgery including prolapse surgery and hysterectomy
- Pelvic infection or inflammation
- Recurrent infections such as cystitis or thrush
- Pelvic trauma
- Poor posture
- Emotional factors
- It is commonly linked with conditions such as painful bladder syndrome, vaginismus, vulvodynia and endometriosis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Difficulty urinating and emptying the bladder
- Interrupted urine flow
- Painful urination

- Constipation
- Pain during or after bowel movements
- Pain in the lower back, pelvis, hips, coccyx, genitals and/or rectum
- Pain during intercourse
- Pain when you insert a tampon or have a gynaecological examination
- Pelvic floor spasms
- Pain when you do pelvic floor strengthening exercises.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

Pelvic floor relaxation exercises may help you relax your pelvic floor muscles and relieve your symptoms. You can try the following:

Deep breathing exercises

Diaphragmatic breathing is often used in yoga and is where you breathe into your belly instead of your upper chest muscles. This will help stimulate your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to contract and relax in a way that relieves tension.

- Sit in an upright supported position or lie down on your back.
- Place your hands above your waist either side of your abdomen.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply, bringing air into the base of your lungs. Your hands should move outwards and your belly should move forwards.
- Gently breathe out and allow your ribcage to return to the starting position.

Lower abdominal muscle relaxation

Learning to relax the lower abdominal muscles helps to relax the pelvic floor muscles.

- Like in the deep breathing exercise above, position your hands over your lower abdomen and allow it to relax and bulge forwards into your hands.

Pelvic floor muscle relaxation

If your pelvic floor muscles are in spasm it can be hard to tell if they're contracted or relaxed.

- Either lie on your back with a pillow under your knees or on your side with a pillow between your thighs.
- There are three openings to your pelvis – your vagina, anus and urethra, where your urine comes out. Try to notice any feelings of tension or sensations in and around these openings.
- Try to gently relax the muscles in and around your pelvic openings and allow your pelvic floor to move downwards without straining. Try to get the same feeling as when you start to go to the toilet and the pelvic floor muscles drop and relax to let urine come out. This should not feel uncomfortable.
- Try to combine these exercises with your abdominal breathing.

Total body relaxation

Anxiety and stress can cause tension in your pelvic floor.

- One by one, relax the muscles of your whole body.

Good posture

Good posture can keep pressure off your bladder and pelvic organs. Stretching techniques such as yoga can help you avoid tightening and spasms in the pelvic floor muscles.

Good posture is also important in helping your diaphragm, pelvic floor and abdominal muscles to work well together and allow deep breathing.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about pelvic floor muscle overactivity, please contact us on 020 8725 1333.

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 wings (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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: PHY_PFR_02 **Published:** May 2020 **Review date:** May 2022