

# Pelvic Floor Exercises for Females

This leaflet offers information about pelvic floor exercises for those with a male anatomy, although some individuals may have differences related to personal characteristics, injuries, surgeries, and different treatments that they may have undergone. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the healthcare professional involved in your care.

## What are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles found at the base of your pelvis. They attach from your tailbone to your pubic bone, to form a bowl-like shape.

They support your pelvic organs and surround the openings of the vagina, bowel, and bladder helping maintain continence and enhance sexual function.



## Cancer and pelvic floor muscle function

Some cancer treatments can cause the pelvic floor muscles to not work properly, which may lead to difficulties with sexual function or bladder and bowel symptoms such as incontinence. Common symptoms people may experience during or following cancer treatment are:

- Bladder:
  - Stress urinary incontinence – leakage with coughing, sneezing, and activity (e.g exercise, sexual intercourse)
  - Urgency – a sudden need to go to the toilet
  - Urge urinary incontinence – leakage associated with urgency
  - Frequency – going to the toilet more than 8 times a day
  - Nocturia – Getting up more than once at night to go to the toilet
- Bowel:
  - Faecal incontinence – leakage from activity or urgency
  - Leakage of wind
  - Incomplete emptying – not feeling empty following bowel movements
  - Difficulty getting clean after bowel movements

- Sex:
  - Reduced desire or arousal
  - Painful sex

## How do I squeeze these muscles?

Start in either sitting or lying down with your knees bent. Imagine you are stopping yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop yourself passing urine. Some people find it helpful to think about sucking something up through a straw into their vagina.

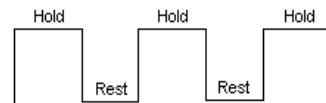
## How to check your technique?

- You can place your hand on your perineum (the skin between your vagina and back passage), you should feel this area lifting up and away from your hand as you squeeze
- Make sure you aren't clenching your jaw, your thighs, or your buttocks, and you're also not holding your breath or pulling your tummy muscles in (as this can reduce the quality of the exercise)

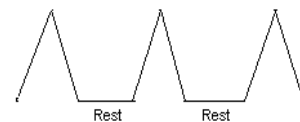
## How to train these muscles?

Pelvic floor muscle exercises (sometimes called kegals) should include both long and short squeezes. The long holds aim to improve your endurance, and the short holds help with reactivity such as protecting from leaks when you cough or sneeze.

1. **Long squeezes:** squeeze your pelvic floor muscles as described earlier, hold for as long as your can and then relax. Aim for 10 second squeezes. Make sure you relax fully before you squeeze again. Aim to repeat this 10 times.



2. **Short squeezes:** quickly squeeze your pelvic floor muscles, then let them go again. See how many times you can do this before the muscles tire. Again, always make sure you relax fully in-between each repetition. Aim to repeat this 10 times.



\*You should aim to complete these exercises three to four times a day and aim to work the muscles until they tire.

If you can only hold the contraction/squeeze for a few seconds or only do a few repetitions to start with before tiring, don't worry! Keep training them and gradually add more seconds and more repetitions as you get stronger. Training the pelvic floor is just like training other muscles of the body. It takes time, consistency, and motivation.

## How do I progress these exercises?

Once you can complete 10 repetitions of 10 second holds, try completing the exercises in standing or other challenging positions like during a squat or a lunge.

Doing this regularly for at least three months will help to build the strength and effectiveness of these muscles.

'The Knack' is a functional technique you can use to make sure your pelvic floor muscles are working when you need them to. Try squeezing them when you cough, sneeze, laugh, or lift something heavy. This can help to reduce or prevent leakage with these activities.

## When to seek help?

You may benefit from an assessment with a pelvic health physiotherapist if:

- You have practiced these exercises consistently for 8-12 weeks and you have not started to see a change in your symptoms
- You are unable to feel a squeeze or lift
- OR if your symptoms get worse when you do these exercises

Please speak to your GP or treating clinician who can support you with this.

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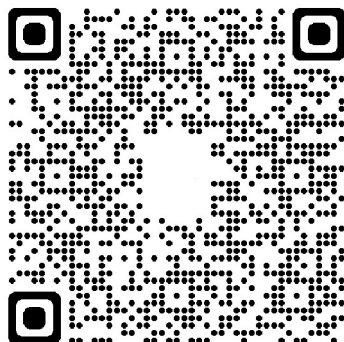
## Useful sources of information

NHS recommended "Squeezy" app

[Home Page - Squeezy \(squeezezyapp.com\)](http://squeezezyapp.com)

Pelvic Health Resource Page

[Patient Resources - St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(stgeorges.nhs.uk\)](http://stgeorges.nhs.uk)



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 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](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

### **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://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.



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