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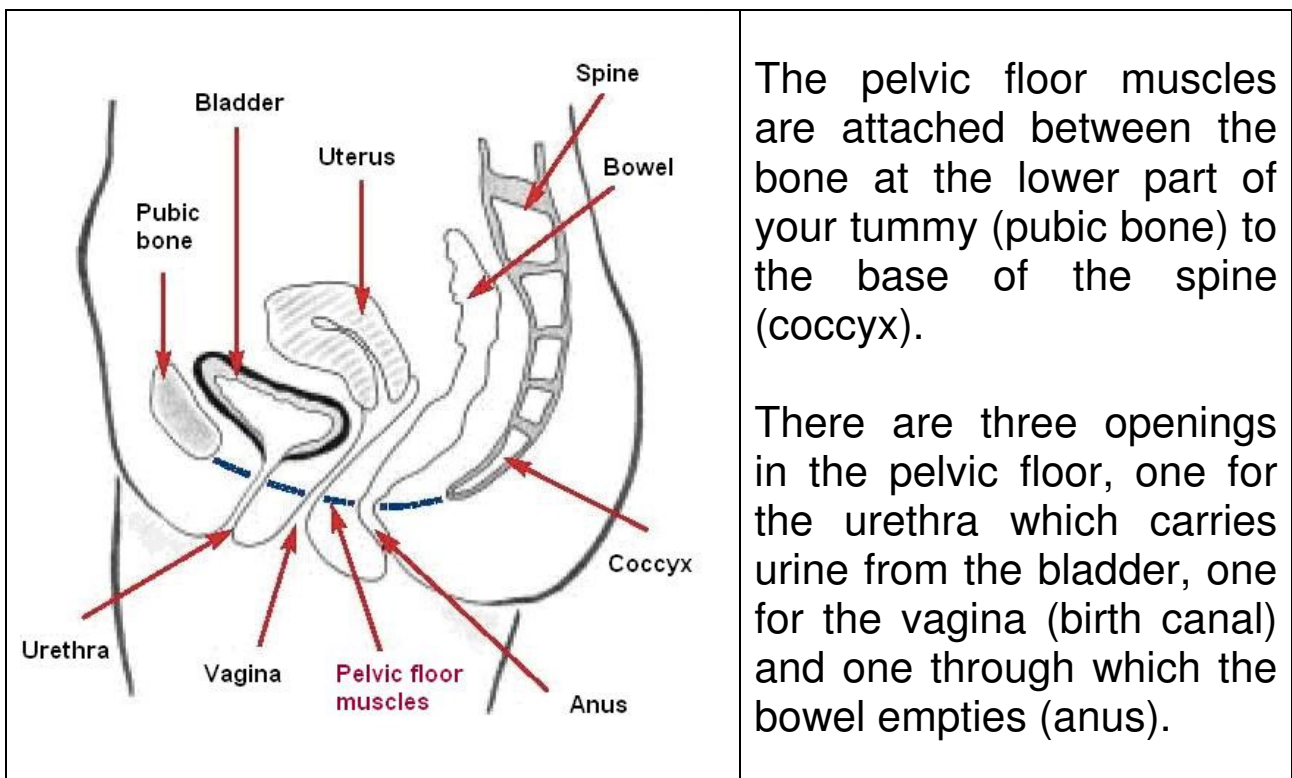
Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Women

Improving your bladder control

About your pelvic floor muscles

They:

- Support the bladder where urine is stored, the uterus (womb), and the bowel
- Assist normal bladder and bowel function and prevent leakage (incontinence)
- Contribute to sexual function



The pelvic floor muscles are attached between the bone at the lower part of your tummy (pubic bone) to the base of the spine (coccyx).

There are three openings in the pelvic floor, one for the urethra which carries urine from the bladder, one for the vagina (birth canal) and one through which the bowel empties (anus).



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What might affect the pelvic floor muscles?

In women, the pelvic floor muscles may be affected as a result of:

- Pregnancy
- Following childbirth
- Changes due to the menopause
- Persistent constipation
- Chest problems with a chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Being generally unfit
- Some medical conditions
- Lifting heavy loads at work or home

“Weak pelvic floor muscles can result in urine leakage on effort or exertion, or on sneezing, coughing or laughing.”

How to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

You will need to learn, and regularly carry out, your pelvic floor muscle exercises. To begin, choose a quiet time and place, so you can concentrate on learning the exercises correctly.

Sit, stand or lie down, with your feet comfortably apart. You can do the exercises in any of these positions. Relax and breathe normally.



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Pelvic floor muscle exercises

You are going to learn to carry out both slow and fast pelvic floor muscle exercises.

- Concentrate, then squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine. Then tighten the muscles around the back passage, as if you are trying not to pass wind. By doing these two together, you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and squeeze for as long as you can, then 'let go' and relax for about 4 seconds. You may only be able to hold for a few seconds to begin with, but your aim is to hold for 10 seconds, repeated at least 8 times. To begin with, watch a second hand on a clock, and then you can really tell how long you can hold on for.
- It is also a good idea to try and practice some fast contractions. 'Squeeze and let go' your pelvic floor muscles in the same way as before but much faster - about one per second for 10 seconds.

You have the best chance of success if you practice doing these slow and fast contractions 3 times every day for at least three months.

If you want to, you can try placing a small mirror between your legs and look at the skin between your vagina and anus to see if this area moves up and inwards when you contract your pelvic floor muscles.



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Improving your bladder control

There are other simple measures you can take to promote a healthy bladder and pelvic floor.

- To prevent or reduce urine leakage, squeeze the pelvic floor muscles tightly *at the same time* as you do any activity that usually causes urine leakage. This procedure is called *The Knack*
- Reduce the intake of caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee, chocolate and fizzy drinks, as these can increase bladder and bowel symptoms
- Avoid constipation and straining
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Maintain a fluid intake of 1 ½ - 2 litres a day
- If overweight, aim to reduce your weight to an acceptable level for your height and build
- A persistent cough can make it more likely that you leak urine. It is very important that you always tighten your pelvic floor muscles during any coughing and also seek advice from your Doctor
- Smoking can make a cough worse and also increases the risk of cancers, including bladder cancer. If you would like help in stopping smoking, see your Doctor or Practice Nurse for advice
- If you see any blood in your urine, you should contact your Doctor or Practice Nurse for advice



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Urine leakage or incontinence affects as many as 6 million people in the UK¹. Seek further help if the advice given in this leaflet does not improve your symptoms. (¹Continence Foundation 2000)

You must always seek advice from your GP if you notice blood in your urine or if your symptoms worsen.

Further advice and help is available from:

- Your **GP**, who may also refer you to other Specialists for advice.
- The **Practice Nurse, District Nurse** or **Health Visitor** may be able to give further advice.
- A **Continence Specialist** or **Advisor** is an experienced Specialist Nurse, Physiotherapist or other Health Care Professional. There may be such a specialist in your area.
- A **Uro-Gynaecologist** is a Gynaecologist who specialises in bladder problems for women.
- A **Urologist** specialises in the branch of medicine dealing with the genitourinary system.

The decision to refer you to the Uro-Gynaecologist or Urologist is usually made by your GP. In some areas, the Continence Specialist can make this referral.

Details of the services available in your area are available from your Health Trust, Clinic or Health Centre, or GP Practice.



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There are many useful organisations which may be of further help and support, such as the Bladder and Bowel Foundation at

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Details of other organisations are available from your local Continence Service.

PAUL HARTMANN LTD
Heywood Distribution Park
Pilsworth Road
Heywood
Lancashire OL10 2TT
Tel: 01706 363200
Fax: 01706 363201
www.hartmanndirect.co.uk

This leaflet has been developed by the HARTMANN Professional Development Group (NHS Continence Advisors), and Jeanette Haslam, Specialist Continence Physiotherapist (January 2009)

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