



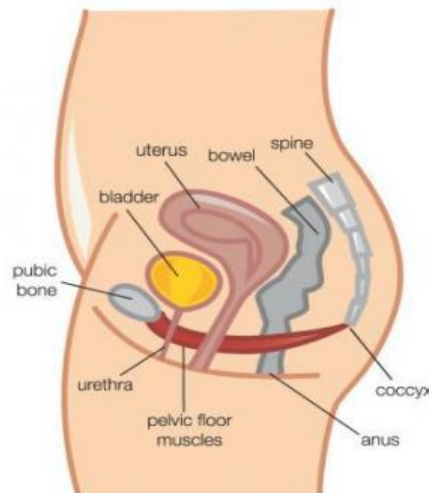
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All Wales Adult Cystic Fibrosis Centre **Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Women**

What is the Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor is made up of a group of muscles that form a broad sling running from the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis to the tail bone at the back and as their name suggests form the floor of the pelvis. They are responsible for bladder and bowel control.



How does it work?

The muscles of the pelvic floor are kept firm and slightly tense to prevent leakage from the bladder and bowel. When you pass urine or have a bowel motion your pelvic floor will relax. Afterwards it will tighten to restore control again.

If your pelvic floor weakens, its ability to maintain its support and control around the outlets from the pelvic organs is reduced. You may experience difficulty controlling wind or experience some leaking from your bladder when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise.

How can exercising the pelvic floor help?

There are specific pelvic floor exercises that can strengthen these muscles so that they can provide support again. This in turn will improve your bladder control and improve or stop leaking from the bladder. As with other muscles of the body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger the pelvic floor muscle will be.

How do I contract my pelvic floor?

It is important to be able to isolate the muscle in order to be able to exercise it in the right way. i.e. to be able to contract your pelvic floor without clenching your buttocks or thighs.

The best way to start is to sit or lie comfortably with your legs relaxed and knees slightly apart. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind! At the same time imagine you are trying to stop yourself urinating in mid-stream. You should be able to feel an upwards motion. Try not to squeeze you buttocks or tighten your thighs or stomach muscles. It is important you get this right before you go any further.

How can I check I have isolated the muscle correctly?

Ways in which you can test if you have isolated the muscle correctly can be:

- 1) Try stopping mid-stream when urinating. You may be able to completely stop the flow or slow it down depending how strong your pelvic floor is. However you should only contract it once then relax allowing the bladder to empty fully. You should not do this test every time you urinate as you may prevent complete emptying of the bladder
- 2) Take a look down below using a mirror to check that you're not bearing down. When you do a correct pelvic floor contraction you should see movement away from the mirror.

How do I exercise my pelvic floor?

Once you're happy that you can isolate your pelvic floor muscle contraction you should be ready to start exercising your pelvic floor. There are two ways in which you can exercise your pelvic floor either by performing **short fast contractions** or **slow controlled contractions**.

Design your own programme

In order to be able to improve the strength and function of your pelvic floor you first need to identify what it can do. With each of the exercises that follow there is a description how you can assess this.

Once you have completed your self assessment you should be able to create your own individualised exercise programme. Your exercise programme should include both slow controlled contractions and short fast contractions.

Your physiotherapist will be able to guide you through this until you are confident you understand what to do and how to progress each exercise.

Short fast contractions

The fast contraction exercise will help your pelvic floor to react quickly when you laugh, cough, sneeze or exercise and therefore help to reduce and prevent leaking from your bladder when performing such tasks.

A fast contraction involves performing the upward lift *quickly* and to its *maximum*. Between each contraction you must be able to *feel* the muscle relax or "let go".

When you begin to lose the feeling of the muscle completely relaxing between each contraction, that's where you stop and rest.

• Self assessment

How many fast contractions can you do?

Box 1

• Exercise one

i) Contract and relax your pelvic floor aiming to achieve the same number of contractions as in your self assessment (box one) with one extra contraction

ii) Rest for about one minute

Repeat times

Complete times a day

Slow contractions

The slow contractions will help improve the overall strength and support of the pelvic floor at rest and during activity.

A slow contraction involves holding onto the upward and forward lift for a period of time.

- **Self assessment**

How many seconds you can hold it for?

Box 2

How many times can you repeat the long contraction?

Box 3

Remember between each contraction you should be able to feel your pelvic floor completely relax or “let go”. It is important not to hold your breath during each long contraction.

There are 2 exercises that you can perform to either improve how long you can hold the contraction or improve how many times you can repeat the long contraction.

- **Exercise two** (improve hold time)

- Contract and hold for as long as your assessment contraction (box 2). Continue to hold for an extra one second
- Relax your pelvic floor and rest for at least double the time of step one
- Repeat the above two steps. How many repetitions can you manage?
- Rest for approximately one minute

Repeat times

Complete times a day

- **Exercise three** (improve number of repetitions)

- Contract your pelvic floor and hold for the same time that you managed in your initial assessment contraction (box 2)
- Relax your pelvic floor and rest for at least double the time of step one
- Repeat these two steps for the same number of long contractions in your self assessment (Box 3) plus and extra one

Repeat times

Complete times a day

Your physiotherapist will advise you which exercises are appropriate for you and how often you should complete each one. As your pelvic floor gets stronger you will be able to progress the number of repetitions or frequency. Again your physiotherapist will advise you on how to progress each exercise.

How can I use my pelvic floor to reduce leaking on a day to day basis?

“The Knack”

The knack is a technique where you contract your pelvic floor in preparation and throughout activities where you may normally experience leaking, or where there is an increase in intra-abdominal pressure such as when coughing, huffing, sneezing, lifting or exercising.

Using “the knack” will help you to regain control of your bladder. Remember to try and hold the contraction for the duration of the cough, huff or lift.

For good results you need to allow time. In order to build up your pelvic floor muscles to their maximum strength you need to be performing these exercises regularly. You may not notice an improvement for several weeks and you will not reach your maximum performance for a few months.

When you have regained control over your bladder or bowel, you should continue to use *“the knack”*. It should become a lifelong habit!

Bladder Management tips

- Aim to drink 6 - 8 glasses of fluid a day avoiding caffeine where possible
- If you do drink caffeine try and drink half a glass followed by a glass of water
- Try to drink naturally decaffeinated drinks not artificially decaffeinated drinks
- Fluid balance is important to avoid constipation, it is important to avoid straining

Help is available

If you have any concerns or questions regarding this information sheet or any other aspects of incontinence ask your physiotherapist, Doctor or a member of your CF team looking after you for help.

Contact details

Physiotherapist _____ (029) 20 716256