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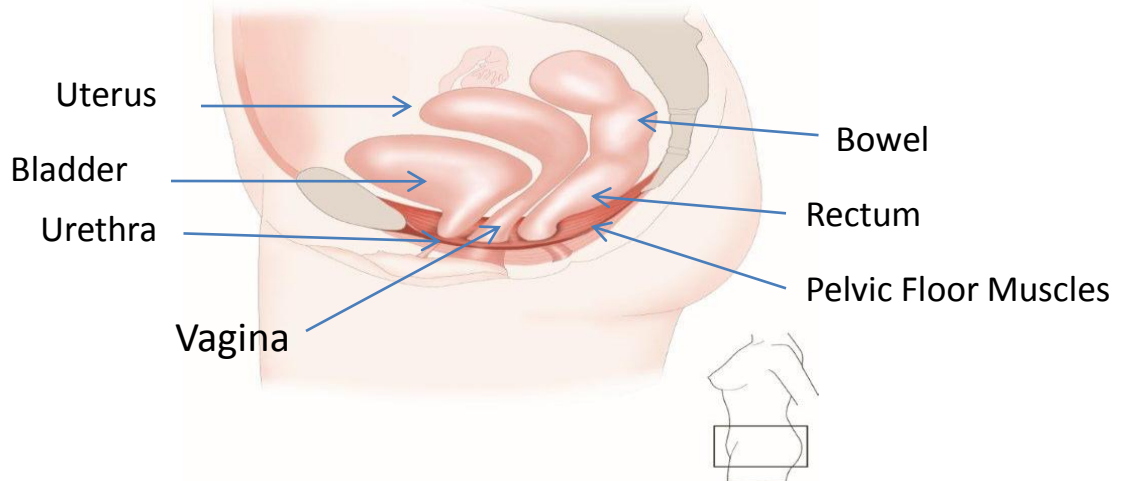
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
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University Health Board

Department of Physiotherapy – Woman's health

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE

The pelvic floor muscle has 4 roles:

- Supports the pelvic contents
- Helps maintain continence
- Helps with sexual function
- Provides spinal and pelvic stability



HOW TO DO THE PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE

It is really important to find the correct muscle and the best way to do this is by doing the following:

Tighten around the back passage as if to stop passing wind. Now tighten your muscles as if stopping a wee. Aim for an upwards and forwards lift, trying to bring the back passage towards the pubic bone. Make sure you fully release/let go of the muscles following the lift.

This is called a pelvic floor contraction.

It is important to get this right before you progress any further as you need to have a good awareness of your pelvic floor muscles, particularly the upwards and forwards lift and the release/let go

CHECK YOUR TECHNIQUE

It is easy to use the wrong muscles when trying to do a pelvic floor contraction. Some women bear down to cause a feeling of movement within the vagina. This is completely wrong and should be avoided. Also avoid tightening your stomach, buttocks and legs and make sure you breathe normally.

The following tests will help.

- Belly button test** – if your belly button remains relatively still while performing a pelvic floor exercise, your technique is correct.
- Mirror test** – using a mirror, look at your vagina and back passage. When you do a correct pelvic floor contraction, there should be a small movement of the muscle AWAY from the mirror.

More importantly you should **not** see any bulging TOWARDS the mirror as it means you are bearing down.

If you have recently had surgery or a baby do not do this next test (vaginal test) until at least 6 weeks after surgery or delivery.

- Vaginal test.** This one is really important, because it will tell you what your muscle is actually doing. Place your finger/thumb into your vagina, then do a pelvic floor muscle contraction. If you are doing this correctly you may feel your finger lift in an upward and forward direction. With strong muscles you may also feel your finger being drawn inside. If your finger is being pushed out, it means you are bearing down. If you feel nothing, don't worry, you may not be using the correct technique or your muscles may be weak.

You need to **actively** contract your pelvic floor muscles to the best of your ability BEFORE and DURING the activities that cause or worsen your symptoms. This can be achieved in two ways:

1. The knack

Remember to contract the pelvic floor muscles as strongly as you can before any sudden activity (i.e. Coughing or sneezing) that would normally cause you to leak, this will further enhance your progress.

2. Sub-maximal functional bracing

This is where you try to contract the pelvic floor muscle at around 30% - 50% of your maximum contraction. Try to sustain this level of contraction whilst performing a more prolonged task (i.e. Carrying, lifting and stairs).

Practice makes perfect!

YOUR INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE PROGRAMME

To improve the strength and co-ordination of your pelvic floor muscles it's important that you find out what it can do, and then just do "a little more". If you **over do it**, your muscle will become tired and not work as effectively, and symptoms may temporarily increase. If you **under do it**, you will make no improvement. We want your muscle to be able to:

- Have the ability to respond quickly
- Hold on for a length of time
- Not tire quickly (endurance)
- Release/let go completely

CHECK YOUR FAST CONTRACTIONS

You now need to perform the upward lift **quickly** and to its **maximum**, remembering to **release / let go completely** between each attempt.

How many identical FAST contractions can you do in a row before your muscles get tired?

BOX 1

To do this correctly you need to FEEL the 'let go' after each contraction e.g. If on your 5th contraction you cannot feel the 'let go' then enter 4 in BOX 1.

CHECK YOUR SLOW CONTRACTIONS

A slow contraction is holding on to the upward and forward lift for a period of time.

How many seconds can you hold your maximum contraction for before your muscles get tired? You need to rest for approximately 4 seconds in between each contraction.

BOX 2

How many times can you repeat this long contraction before your muscles get tired?

BOX 3

Remember you need to feel the 'let go' completely after each contraction.

You now have all the information you need to design your own individual exercise programme. Change and improvement takes time and effort. It may take at least 3 months to notice any changes.

Remember make **YOUR** muscle work for **YOU** by using it when **YOU** need it.

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