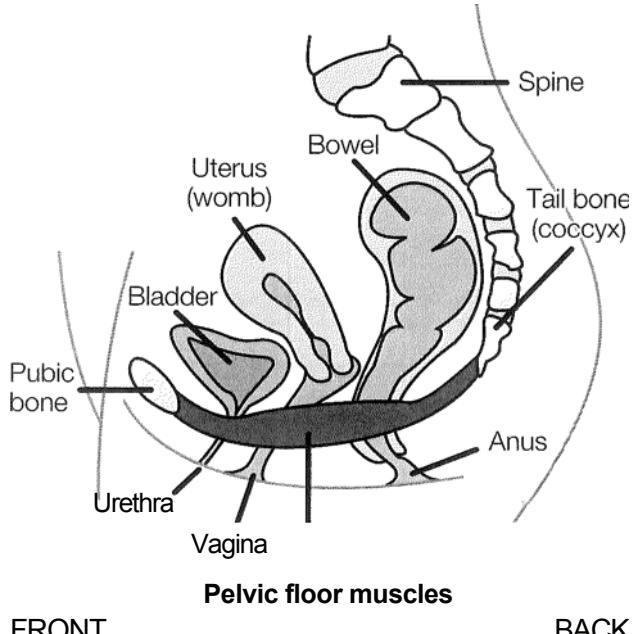




What is your pelvic floor and where is it?

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscles that extend from your tail bone (coccyx) to your pubic bone at the front. It provides the floor to your pelvis (the bottom part of your abdomen/tummy) and supports the contents of your pelvis - your bladder, uterus (womb) and anus (back passage).



Side view of a woman's pelvic organs and pelvic floor muscles

If the pelvic floor weakens, you may experience a range of symptoms including:

- an aching or dragging sensation in your vagina
- a feeling of something coming down inside your vagina, which may be due to a prolapse. This is where one or more organs in your pelvis, such as your womb or vagina drop down from their normal position
- a tendency to leak urine when you cough, laugh or sneeze. This is called stress urinary incontinence
- a need to go to the toilet frequently (referred to as urinary frequency) during the day or night
- an urgent need to visit the toilet and leaking before you get there or if you don't go (urge incontinence)
- an urgent need to visit the toilet to empty your bowels and/or leaking stool (poo, faeces) before you get there or if you don't go (urge faecal incontinence).

All women need to do pelvic floor exercises throughout their lives. Pelvic floor muscles may become weak due to childbirth, as a result of menopause or following pelvic surgery, such as hysterectomy (removal of your womb) or bladder repair.

Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen your muscles so that they can give your organs support again. This will improve your bladder/bowel control and improve or stop any leakage.

How to do pelvic floor exercises

Although with practice, pelvic floor exercises can be done anywhere and anytime,

it is best to learn the exercises in the following position:

- sit on a chair, toilet seat or toilet lid
- make sure that your feet are flat on the floor and your legs are slightly apart
- lean forwards, resting your elbows on your knees.

There are two types of exercises - **slow twitch** and **fast twitch**. It is important that you do the slow twitch first and then the fast twitch each time you exercise your pelvic floor muscles.

To perform the slow twitch exercises:

1. Close and draw up the muscles around your back passage, as if you are trying to stop passing wind (farting). Make sure that you do not contract your buttock muscles while you do this
2. Continue to close and draw up the muscles around your vagina and urethra, as though you are trying to stop the flow of urine
3. Hold for as long as you can, and then slowly relax and let go. Rest for the same amount of time. For example, hold for a count of 8, then relax for a count of 8
4. Slowly increase the length of time that you hold each contraction for and do as many as you can until you feel your muscle getting tired

To perform the fast twitch exercises:

1. Pull up the pelvic floor muscles as before
2. Hold for one second and then relax
3. Repeat 5-10 times or until your muscles feel tired

It is important to try **not to**:

- squeeze your buttocks together
- bring your knees together
- hold your breath.

If you do any of these, you are not contracting (tightening) your muscles correctly.

How often should I do my exercises?

Aim to do your pelvic floor exercises on a daily basis and be sure to include both types of pelvic floor contractions (both fast and slow twitch).

Fewer good squeezes are better than lots of ineffective ones, however, you should try to challenge yourself by attempting to increase both the number of repetitions and the holding time.

If you do not see a change in your muscle strength after three months, ask for help from your nurse or doctor. We can refer you to other specialists, physiotherapists or continence advisors, if your symptoms persist. Do not expect instant results! It will take several weeks of regular exercise to regain the strength in your pelvic floor muscles. You need to do these exercises for the rest of your life. If you stop exercising, your problems will return.