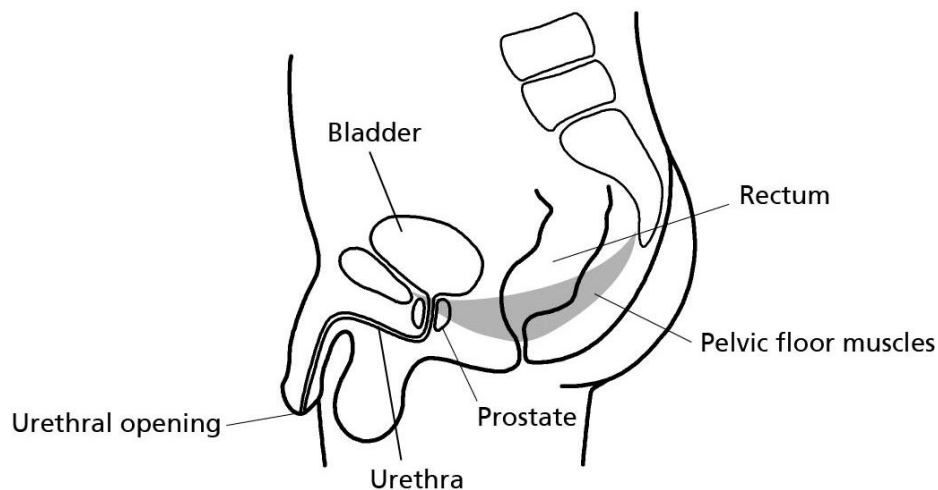


# The pelvic floor muscles (men)

Bladder and Bowel Care Service

## Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01392 402093 or at [rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net) (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services) or on 01271 314090 or at [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net) (for North Devon services).



## What and where are they?

The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscle and connective tissue at the bottom of your pelvis. It attaches to the pubic bone at the front, to the coccyx (tail bone) at the back, and to the inside walls of the pelvis. Sphincters/valves at the base of the bladder and prostate gland help bladder control. The anal sphincter maintains bowel control.

## What does the pelvic floor do?

The pelvic floor muscles help to keep the bladder and bowel openings closed to prevent leakage of urine, faeces or wind. They help maintain bladder and bowel control. They are also important for sexual function, helping to maintain an erection and may prevent premature ejaculation. Men of all ages can suffer from incontinence or erectile dysfunction, and strengthening the pelvic floor muscles may help these problems.

## Why do I need to exercise my pelvic floor?

All muscles need to be exercised to stay strong. The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened in several ways, for example:

- Excessive weight or poor physical fitness
- Chest problems causing chronic cough
- Long term constipation
- Prolonged heavy lifting
- Ageing
- Surgery, especially prostate operations
- Pelvic radiation therapy may affect the muscles and their nerve supply
- Some medical conditions such as multiple sclerosis, stroke and diabetes may affect the nerve supply to the muscles.
- Injury to the perineum, for example from prolonged cycling.

## Symptoms of a weak pelvic floor

- Stress urinary incontinence: urinary leakage on coughing, sneezing, laughing or during activity.
- Urgency/urge urinary incontinence: a sudden feeling that you need to urinate, that may also result in leakage.
- Bowel/anal incontinence: accidental loss of faeces or wind from the bowel
- Post-micturition dribble: leakage of a few drops of urine after you have finished passing urine.
- Erectile dysfunction: not being able to gain or maintain an erection.
- Premature ejaculation: ejaculation during sexual activity sooner than you or your partner would like.
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises may be helpful for these symptoms. It is useful to get into a good habit of doing them, even if you don't have symptoms.

## How do I find my pelvic floor?

Sit comfortably with your buttocks, legs and tummy relaxed and try to keep breathing normally. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind by pulling up the back passage. Next, squeeze and lift from the front as if you are trying to stop passing urine. When you feel you have the hang of it, try lifting the front and back together. This is a pelvic floor muscle contraction. It is more effective to perform a muscle contraction on an out-breath.

To check that your pelvic floor muscles are working correctly:

- Place your fingers on your perineum/anus and feel it lift as you contract the pelvic floor muscles.
- Stand in front of a mirror; when you do a pelvic floor muscle contraction you should see the base of your penis draw inwards and your testicles / scrotum lift.

## Exercises

### To strengthen the muscles

Contract your pelvic floor muscles and count how many seconds you can hold effectively. Hold at the top of the 'lift' for up to 10 seconds. Release and rest for 5 seconds. Try to breathe normally. You may feel your tummy muscles tighten, which is fine.

Repeat as many times as you can (up to 10)

### To make the muscles work quickly, when you need them

Count how many quick contractions you can do before the muscles tire. Pull the muscles in quickly and let go again, up to 10 times.

**This is your set of exercises, which you should practice 3 times a day. Gradually increase the length of hold and the number of repetitions over the next few weeks. Aim for 10 repetitions of 10 second squeezes, followed by up to 10 short squeezes.**

### Remember

Set aside times to do the exercises when you are not busy with something else.

A full set must be done each time, to work well.

When you can do the exercises well in sitting, try doing them in standing.

## Using the muscles

If you find you dribble some urine after leaving the toilet, it can be helpful to do a couple of strong squeezes after urinating. This can help get rid of some of the excess urine before you leave the toilet.

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during any activity that causes urinary leakage (for example, coughing, sneezing, lifting or moving from sitting to standing), so that this becomes an automatic habit.

If you are sexually active, tighten your pelvic floor muscles during intercourse to maintain the quality of your erection.

## Other things you can do to help

Lose weight if you need to (check with your GP for advice)

Avoid constipation – straining to empty your bowels may weaken pelvic floor muscles

Avoid heavy lifting where possible

If you ride a bicycle for long periods, reduce pressure on your perineum by raising yourself off the saddle regularly and by wearing padded shorts. Get advice on specialist saddles which may reduce pressure.

## Final thought

It takes 3-6 months to strengthen pelvic floor muscles with regular training, don't be disheartened if improvement is slow, and don't give up!

Just like any other muscles in the body, the pelvic floor muscles will become weak if not exercised regularly. Therefore, these exercises must become as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth!

It is easy to forget to do your pelvic floor muscle exercises. Helpful ways to remember may include:

- doing the exercises after urinating
- setting reminders on your phone
- using a male pelvic floor muscle app

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## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact:

PALS Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter

- call 01392 402093 or email [rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Wonford, Exeter.

PALS North Devon

- call 01271 314090 or email [rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple.

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