



ST. MICHAEL'S  
HOSPITAL  
Dún Laoghaire

Pelvic Floor Centre

# Your pelvic floor exercise programme



## Where are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles sit like a hammock, spreading from the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis, to the tail bone (coccyx) at the back. They 'fan out' to both sit bones to form the floor at the base of the abdominal cylinder. Other components of this cylinder include the diaphragm above, the abdominal muscles at the front and the muscles of the spine behind.

These muscles balance pressure and support of the organs within the abdominal cylinder and they work dynamically with every breath and every move we make.

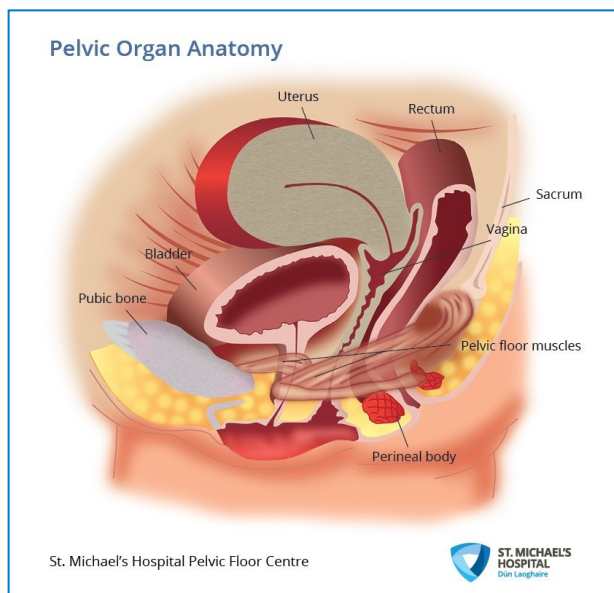
The pelvic floor muscles are made up of a deep and superficial layer, and include the urethra sphincter and the external sphincter muscles.

The pelvic floor muscles are made up of 2 distinct muscle fibre types.

Slow twitch fibres provide a stabilising, supportive role and fast twitch fibres need to react quickly to prevent leakage e.g. with sport or coughing.

The pelvic floor muscles are important as they:

1. Provide support to the organs above, the bladder, uterus and bowel
2. Aid in maintaining continence of both bladder and bowel. They need to work dynamically to hold in urine and faeces, but also need to be able to release to allow both to pass.
3. Are important in sexual function
4. Contribute to pelvic joint stability



## To optimise your pelvic floor function, follow the 4 step programme below—

### 1. Learn how to find your pelvic floor muscles and ‘waken them up’

A good place to start is lying on a bed, on your back with your knees bent. Place your hands on your tummy and gently breathe in/ out, feeling your tummy rise and fall.

Without tilting your pelvis, think about trying to ‘lift your back passage up and forwards towards your water passage’.

Keep breathing as you do this and try to hold the muscle as you breathe. Hold for 5 seconds. Release.

Hopefully you will have felt your pelvic floor ‘lift’ or ‘tighten’. If you are uncertain, try the following and see if they give you a better ‘connection’ to your pelvic floor.

- ‘Try to tighten around your water passage’
- Try to tighten your back passage, as if trying to stop passing wind, without squeezing your buttocks’.

‘Getting the pelvic floor muscles working can take some time and patience, especially if you have had nerve damage or a long standing problem.

Keep sending the message to the muscles or speak to your women’s health physiotherapist for guidance.

Techniques, such as biofeedback, can help to increase awareness.

### 2. Working that pelvic floor

Once you can connect with the pelvic floor, you need to work the slow muscle fibres and the fast muscle fibres.

As in step 1, pull up your pelvic floor muscles and hold for 5–10 seconds as you can manage. Keep breathing and then release. Repeat this contraction 10 times.

Your fast fibres also need to work so lift the pelvic floor as tight as you can, hold 1–2 seconds and then release. Do this quickly 10 times.

Start in lying, as above, or sitting.

Once you can do the recommended contractions below you can start to do at least one of your daily sets in standing.

### Recommended programme

Aim to do

- 10 fast contractions
- 10 slow contractions, working to be able to hold each for 10 seconds
- 3 times each day for 3–4 months.

### 3. Make your pelvic floor exercises 'task specific'!

Think about what activity or position you might be in when your symptoms are worse e.g. do you leak urine with specific activities, such as jogging or getting out of bed in the morning.?

If so, then you need to train the pelvic floor muscles to work in these positions. For example, if you leak when you run, your pelvic floor initially has to work in standing, then standing on one leg, then in a short jog to a longer run.

Your physiotherapist can help you with these progressions and each person may have their own specific goals, so keep going with your exercises!

### 4. The knack

**'The knack' is the ability to tighten your pelvic floor BEFORE you cough, sneeze, laugh, lift anything**

(even your shopping bag or kettle) so that your pelvic floor is 'protecting you' and giving you support from underneath when you need it most.

'The knack' should become part of our everyday movement patterns. Even movements like going from 'sit to stand' or 'getting out of bed' challenge your pelvic floor muscles and can be when leakage happens.

'The knack' can help with this. Check in with your pelvic floor prior to moving!

### Why exercise your pelvic floor muscles?

Evidence has found that a supervised pelvic floor exercise programme for 12-16 weeks can considerably help with symptoms of urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse.

**Don't ignore your pelvic floor—if we don't use it, we lose it, so it's up to you!**

One of the challenges of these exercises is to remember to do them daily. Charts or specific pelvic floor exercise apps can help.

Work out a way that suits you or speak to your women's health physiotherapist for further advice.

In addition to the above advice, if you are having symptoms related to your bowel, please see the leaflet on 'Anal sphincter muscle control'.

SVHG document control

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