

#### Equality Statement

At South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust we are fully committed to quality and diversity, both as an employer and as a service provider. We have a policy statement in our Equality Strategy that clearly outlines our commitment to equality for service users, patients and staff:

- You and your family have the right to be treated fairly and be routinely involved in decisions about your treatment and care. You can expect to be treated with dignity and respect. You will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation
- You have a responsibility to treat other service users, patients and or staff with dignity and respect

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print.

#### PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600054, by email: [Pals@swft.nhs.uk](mailto:Pals@swft.nhs.uk) or by calling in person to the PALS office which is located in the Lakin Road entrance to the hospital.

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Approved by  
SWFT Patient  
Information  
Group

## Physiotherapy

# Pelvic Floor Exercises

## Patient Information Leaflet

If you require any further information please contact: Clinical Lead in Pelvic Health Team 01926 608068

## Introduction

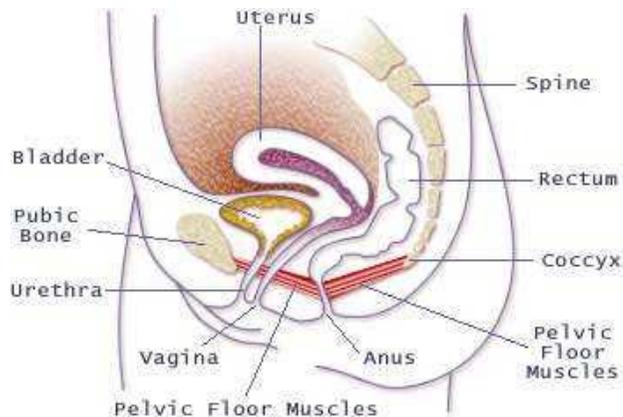
Many women suffer from weakness of their pelvic floor muscles. The symptoms are variable, for example:

- Leaking urine with activity such as running, jumping, coughing and sneezing.
- A sudden and urgent need to pass urine
- Leakage of stool (faeces) from the back passage
- Decreased satisfaction during sexual intercourse

## The Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are a broad sling of muscles, like a trampoline, stretching from the pubic bone at the front to the tail bone at the back. They form the floor of the pelvis and are responsible for:

- Supporting the pelvic organs - the bladder, bowel and womb.
- Controlling the outlets from the pelvic organs - the urethra, vagina and anus.



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**Advice (continued)**

## Bladder emptying

It is important to empty the bladder completely each time you go to the toilet. If you think your bladder may not be completely empty try rocking your pelvis forwards and backwards, it may help to empty a little more.

## Frequency of bladder emptying

Try to avoid emptying your bladder too frequently as this can reduce the bladder's capacity. You should aim not to empty more than every 3 hours. You may need to train your bladder to hold more by trying delaying techniques when you feel the urge to go e.g.

- keep calm and tighten the pelvic floor muscles,
- sit on something hard
- curl your toes hard
- distract your mind by counting backwards, saying a poem, singing a song etc.

If problems continue you may need to seek further medical advice.

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**Advice**

**Avoid being overweight**

Extra weight means the muscles have more work to do. Maintaining the correct weight can make a considerable difference to your symptoms

### **Avoid constipation**

Straining to open your bowels stretches the pelvic floor muscles making them weaker. It is important to drink plenty of fluids and you may need to adjust your diet

### **Drink adequate fluids**

Do not restrict your fluid intake, you should drink at least 3 to 4 pints of fluid a day, water is best. Try to restrict drinks containing caffeine, e.g. coffee, tea, cola as these may irritate your bladder. Drinking less will not make you leak less, indeed it may make your symptoms worse as your urine will be more concentrated

### **Avoid heavy lifting**

Lifting increases the pressure in your abdomen and puts extra strain on the pelvic floor. Remember to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before lifting, and hold tight until you release the load

### **Exercise to avoid**

Double leg lifts and sit-ups should be avoided as they put severe pressure on the pelvic floor. Avoid high impact exercises e.g. anything involving both feet off the ground at the same time such as jumping

### **Sudden movements**

Try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles before coughing, sneezing etc. This will help to prevent leakage

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## **The Pelvic Floor Muscles (continued)**

The pelvic floor muscles are kept in slight tension to stop leakage from the bladder and bowel. When you pass water or

open your bowels the muscles relax and then tighten again afterwards

Weakness of the muscles commonly occurs because of childbirth, chronic constipation, a chronic cough, or being overweight

Pelvic floor muscles can be exercised and strengthened just as any other weak or damaged muscles. Most women's symptoms will improve by following a programme of exercises

## **The Basic Exercise**

- Sit, stand or lie comfortably with your knees slightly apart
- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind or urine and slowly squeeze and lift the muscles, drawing up and closing first around the back and then the front passages

The pelvic floor muscles work closely together with the deep abdominal (tummy) muscles so you may feel some tightening around the lower tummy when doing this exercise – this is normal. However you should not:

- Squeeze your legs together
- Hold your breath
- Tighten your buttocks

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## **The Exercise Programme**

To improve the way your pelvic floor muscles work, it is important to work them hard and regularly.

To set your 'starting programme', tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for as many seconds as you can up to 10 seconds.

**How long can *you* hold the contraction? ..... seconds.**

Release the contraction and rest for the same time. Repeat the tighten, hold, release at least 7 times and up to 10 times if you can

**How many times can *you* repeat the contraction? .....**

For example hold 4 seconds, rest 4 seconds, repeat 6 times.

This exercise will build the endurance of the muscles.

The pelvic floor muscles must also be capable of reacting quickly e.g. on coughing or sneezing so you must practice quick contractions.

Tighten the muscles quickly and strongly and relax.

**Count how many *you* can do.....? Aim for 10 repetitions.**

Your exercise programme should consist of:

- **Endurance – slow controlled muscle contractions and**
- **Quick muscle contractions**

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This is your 'starting programme' and should be repeated at least 3 to 4 times a day. The 'quality' of the exercise you do is important, so you must concentrate.

You will gradually be able to work harder and for longer, i.e. increase your 'hold' time and your 'repetitions'.

As your muscles improve try combining the slow and quick contractions. Tighten your muscles as hard as you can, then try 2 or 3 quick contractions on top.

The most difficult part of the programme is remembering to do the exercises. The following advice may help trigger your memory:

- Put coloured stationery dots in places that will catch your eye e.g. on the fridge, the kettle or your watch.
- Exercise after you have emptied your bladder
- Set an alarm on your watch
- Exercise every time you answer the phone etc.
- It takes time and effort, usually from 3 to 6 months, to gain improvement.

**Persevere. It will be worth it!**

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