

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

The handbook guides you through a program of pelvic floor muscle exercises. These exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscle and may decrease urinary urgency. It can benefit both men and women with:

Exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscle and may decrease urinary urgency.

- stress incontinence (by strengthening and bulking up of the muscle),
- urge incontinence (by controlling or calming the bladder),
- and frequency, urgency, pressure, or pain (by inhibiting the bladder and releasing pelvic floor tension or spasms).

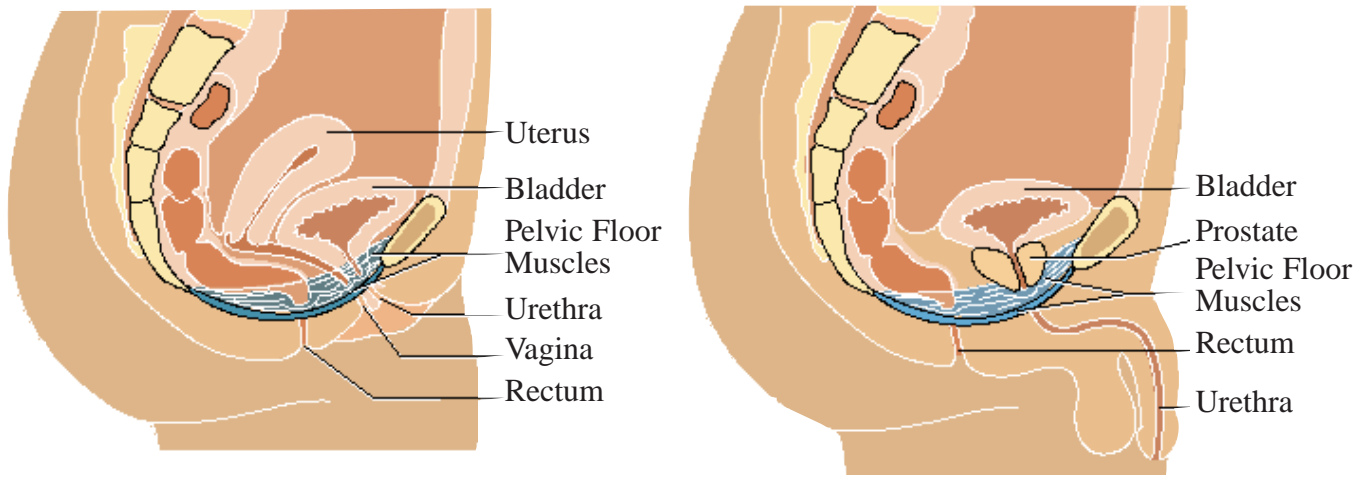
Often, these exercises are suggested before and after certain types of surgery and to new mothers after giving birth.

The pelvic floor muscle surrounds the urethra and rectum (and in women the vagina). (See pictures on the following page.) As the bladder fills with urine, the pelvic floor helps keep the urine in the bladder and prevent leakage. The muscle relaxes during normal urination and allows urine to flow freely.

Exercises

A pelvic floor contraction is a small movement of one specific muscle. A person can identify the group of muscles by simply tensing the ring of muscles around the rectum (women may feel the contraction vaginally) while sitting, standing, or lying. It is important to contract only the pelvic floor muscle. The abdomen, buttock, and thighs must remain relaxed. Contracting the abdomen pushes in the bladder. This causes more pressure leading to leakage or increased urgency. There are two types of pelvic floor exercises:

- Quick Pelvic Floor Contractions – Tighten the pelvic floor muscle quickly (a “wink” of the rectum). This should be a quick powerful contraction. Relax the muscle completely after each contraction.
- Slow (Sustained) Pelvic Floor Contractions – Tighten the pelvic floor muscle and hold it for 3-5 seconds (as instructed) and then relax for 3-5 seconds.



Exercise Program

Do both quick and slow pelvic floor contractions. The quick contractions build muscle strength. The slow contractions build stamina. Each type targets and works specific nerves in the pelvic floor. Each program is tailored to a person's strength and ability to contract the pelvic floor. Patience is needed, and it is important not to fatigue the muscle.

- Start with 10 repetitions of the quick and slow contractions. Do this 4 times a day.
- Every week or two, increase the number of repetitions by 5 (15, 20, 25) until you have reached 30.
- The slow contraction is held for 3-10 seconds, and released for 3-10 seconds.

For best results, do the exercises as instructed, every day; slowly increase the number of repetitions as suggested.

If you have stress incontinence, begin to tighten your pelvic floor muscles:

- when you feel a cough or sneeze coming,
- when someone is telling you a funny story,
- before you stand up,
- before lifting objects, or exerting yourself.

Soon this will become second nature.

If you have urgency or urge incontinence and you are not due to go to the bathroom, do a few contractions, and try to distract yourself. Remember, relaxing the pelvic floor completely after each contraction may be helpful to you. The body can send false urge signals at times.

Helpful Hints

- Place your hand on your abdomen while doing the exercises. The abdomen should not move (except when breathing) during your pelvic floor contractions.
- Stopping the flow of urine during urination is a way of identifying a pelvic floor contraction. Do not do this on a routine basis. This works against the bladder's normal contraction and release of urine. It can be helpful to do now and then to make sure you identify the right muscle. Do not perform your exercises while emptying the bladder.
- Men have an advantage of being able to identify a pelvic floor contraction. If a male does the exercise correctly (while standing naked), the tip of his penis will pull slightly in and up.
- Women who are sexually active can contract the pelvic floor around their partner's penis, and their partner should feel the contraction. This is another way of knowing if the pelvic floor is contracting.
- The exercises must be done on a regular basis over a period of 3 – 4 months. It takes time to build up muscle strength. Perseverance is key.

If you have any questions about these exercises, ask your doctor or nurse. For more information, talk to your doctor about the services offered at Northwestern's Center for Urology.

*Developed by:
The Center for Urology*