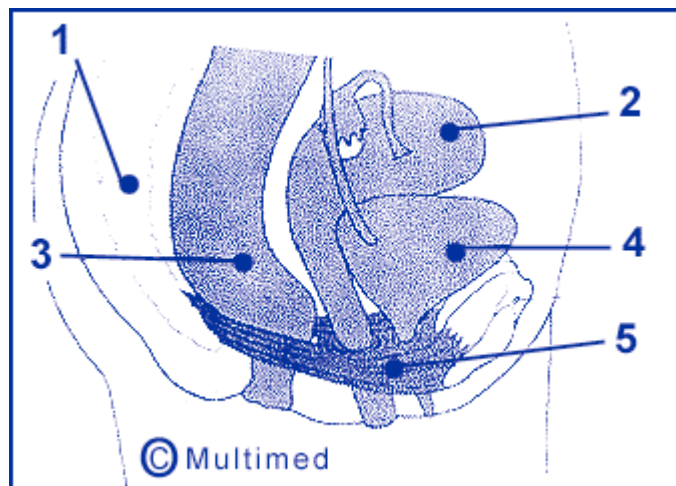


Pelvic Floor Exercises For Women



- 1 The Spine
- 2 The Uterus (Womb)
- 3 The Rectum
- 4 The Bladder
- 5 The Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor is a large sling (or hammock) of muscles stretching from side to side across the floor of the pelvis. It is attached to your pubic bone in front, and to the coccyx (the tail end of the spine) behind. It forms your "undercarriage". The openings from your bladder (urethra), your bowels (rectum) and your womb (vagina) and all pass through your pelvic floor.

What does it do?

- It supports your pelvic organs and abdominal contents, especially when you are standing or exerting yourself.
- It supports the bladder to help it stay closed. It actively squeezes when you cough or sneeze to help avoid leaking. When the muscles are not working effectively you may suffer from leaking ("urinary incontinence"), and/or urgent or frequent need to pass urine.
- It is used to control wind and when "holding on" with your bowels.
- It has an important sexual function, helping to increase sexual awareness both for yourself and your partner during sexual intercourse.

How to do pelvic floor exercises

Exercise 1

Tighten the muscles around your back passage, vagina and front passage and lift up inside as if trying to stop passing wind and urine at the same time. It is very easy to bring other, irrelevant muscles into play, so try to isolate your pelvic floor as much as possible by

- **not** pulling in your tummy,
- **not** squeezing your legs together,
- **not** tightening your buttocks and
- **not** holding your breath.

In this way most of the effort should be coming from the pelvic floor.

Have a go! How many seconds can you hold the pelvic floor tight for? Try holding it as long and as hard as you can. Build up to a maximum of 10 seconds. Rest for 4 seconds and then repeat the contraction as many times as you can up to a maximum of 10 contractions.

Try doing these exercises in a slow and controlled way with a rest of 4 seconds between each muscle contraction. Practise your maximum number of held contractions (up to 10) about six times each day.

Exercise 2

It is important to be able to work these muscles quickly to help them react to sudden stresses from coughing, laughing or exercise that put pressure on the bladder. So you need to practise some quick contractions, drawing in the pelvic floor and holding for just one second before releasing the muscles. Do these in a steady manner: aim for a strong muscle tightening with each contraction up to a maximum of 10 times.

Aim to do one set of slow contractions (exercise 1) followed by one set of quick contractions (exercise 2) six times each day.

Get into the habit!

Get into the habit of doing the exercises. Link doing them to some everyday activities - for example, do them after emptying your bladder or whenever you turn on a tap. Or keep a simple exercise diary (you could have an unlabelled simple tick chart on a kitchen pin board) to help you remember. Practise the exercises when you are lying, sitting and especially standing. Get into the habit of tightening your pelvic floor prior to activities that are likely to make you leak - such as getting up from a chair, coughing, sneezing or lifting.

How long should I do them for?

Pelvic floor exercises should give optimum results with regular exercise within 3 to 6 months, but you should continue them for life to safeguard against problems recurring.

You are strongly recommended to seek help from a health professional if you see little or no change in your symptoms after trying these exercises on your own for three months.