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Ashford Hospital
London Road
Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 3AA
Tel: **01784 884488**

St. Peter's Hospital
Guildford Road
Chertsey, Surrey
KT16 0PZ.
Tel: **01932 872000**

Website: www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Women's Health



FURTHER INFORMATION

www.acpwh.org.uk

www.rcog.org.uk

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you still remain concerned please contact our Complaints Manager on 01932 722612 or email complaints@asph.nhs.uk

Author: Linda Tranter

Department: Women's Health

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HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE DOING IT CORRECTLY

It is not easy to tell if you are doing the exercise correctly as there should be no external signs. When you sit in the bath or stand in the shower put one or two fingers in the vagina and when the pelvic floor muscle tightens you should feel a little squeeze and/or lift.

We do not recommend that you use the “stop mid flow test” but it may be acceptable to try and catch the last few drops using the pelvic floor contraction if you feel you need some feedback that you are using the right muscle. This should only be done occasionally.

FOR HOW LONG WILL YOU HAVE TO DO THIS EXERCISE

You may not notice any improvement in the way the muscle works for about 6 weeks. Do not give up, persevere. Actual strength can take up to 4 or 5 months to develop. Once any symptoms have resolved you can go onto a maintenance regime which requires you to do the exercise block 2 or 3 times a day. These are exercises for life.

This leaflet is intended to give you additional information to that received from a health care professional.

INTRODUCTION

Physiotherapists, doctors, nurses and midwives know that doing pelvic floor exercises regularly can help you improve control of bladder and bowel and also help improve and maintain good pelvic floor function.

All women, and some men, should be encouraged to do pelvic floor exercises as part of their daily routine to prevent problems. When problems arise then the amount of exercise needs to be increased to build up and strengthen the muscles.

WHAT IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor is formed from layers of muscle which stretch underneath from the pubic bone in front to the coccyx at the back – like a sling or hammock. These are firm supportive muscles which help to hold the bladder, womb and bowel in place. They also help to control the bladder and bowel and are the muscles used during intercourse.

HOW DOES THE PELVIC FLOOR WORK?

The muscles of the pelvic floor always have some tone in them to keep them slightly tense in order to stop leakage of urine from the bladder, faeces or wind from the bowel and to keep bladder, womb and bowel in place. When passing water or having a bowel

movement these muscles relax and resume their tension afterwards.

Pelvic floor muscles can become weak because of childbirth, lack of exercise, the Menopause, surgery or just the general ageing process. Weak muscles may lead to leaking a small amount of urine when coughing, sneezing or laughing.

HOW CAN PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES HELP?

An intensive, progressed programme of exercise will strengthen these muscles. This will improve support and function and will help to control or improve any symptoms you may have.

Your symptoms may take up to 4 – 5 months to improve because this is how long it takes to strengthen a muscle. Be prepared to persevere.

LEARNING TO FIND THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

It is important to learn to do the exercise in the correct way. If you do not experience any improvement in symptoms it may be because you are not using the muscles correctly – or even using the wrong muscles.

1. Sit comfortably on a firm chair with your knees slightly apart. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind from the back passage. Tighten and lift the ring of muscle around the back passage. Make sure your buttocks and legs do not move. Hold this for a few seconds – let go.

2. Now imagine you are sitting on the toilet passing urine. Tighten and lift the vaginal muscles as if you were trying to stop the flow. Hold for a few seconds and then let go. This may be harder to do than the first exercise. Don't worry with practice it will get easier.

HOW TO DO THE EXERCISES

Sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart. Slowly tighten and lift the back passage and vaginal muscles as hard as you can. Hold for up to 5 seconds then let go. Repeat this contraction 5 times.

Now pull up the muscles very quickly and let go immediately. Do this 5 times.

This is your exercise set. Try and do this set of exercise at least 5 times a day. As the muscles become more used to working in this way you will find you can hold for longer and do more contractions. Gradually build up until you can do a set of 10 contractions which last for 10 seconds each. Once you have achieved this you need only do your set 2 or 3 times a day.

The most difficult thing about doing pelvic floor exercises is remembering them! To help you with this you need to find a trigger which reminds you. This may be as simple as doing them every time **after** you have used the toilet. It may be that doing them every time you wash your hands or whenever you clean your teeth or have a meal is a good time. Find the trigger which works for you but do not have too many triggers as you will start to ignore them if you do not have time or it is not convenient.