

*If you have any questions, ask your healthcare provider.*

## Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

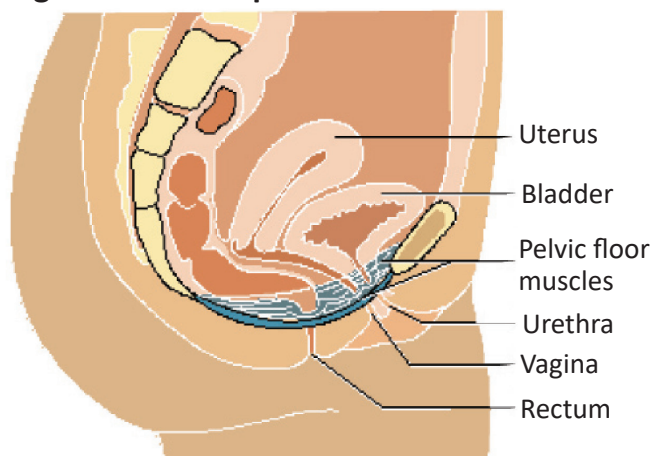
This brochure will help you as you start your program of pelvic floor muscle exercises. These exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles and may decrease urinary urgency. They are often suggested before and after certain types of surgery and for new mothers after giving birth. These exercises can benefit both men and women who have:

- Stress incontinence (by strengthening the muscles)
- Urge incontinence (by controlling or calming the bladder)
- Frequency, urgency, pressure or pain (by improving bladder support and releasing pelvic floor tension or spasms)

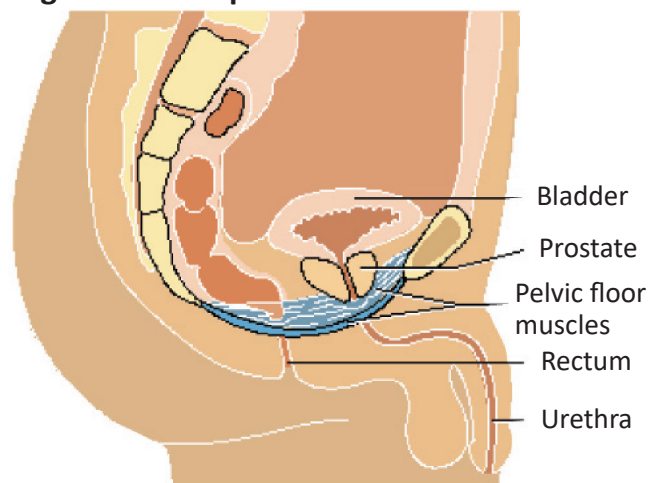
### The pelvic floor

The pelvic floor muscles surround the urethra and rectum (Figures 1 and 2). They also surround the vagina in women. As the bladder fills with urine, the pelvic floor muscles help keep the urine in the bladder and prevent leakage. The muscles relax during normal urination and allow urine to flow freely.

**Figure 1. Female pelvic floor**



**Figure 2. Male pelvic floor**



## Pelvic floor contractions

A pelvic floor contraction is a small movement of the pelvic floor muscles. You 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 muscles. The abdomen, buttocks and thighs must remain relaxed. Contracting the abdomen pushes the bladder. This causes more pressure, leading to leakage or increased urgency. There are 2 types of pelvic floor exercises:

- **Quick pelvic floor contractions** – Tighten your pelvic floor muscles quickly (a “wink” of the rectum). This should be a quick, powerful contraction. Relax the muscles completely after each contraction.
- **Slow (sustained) pelvic floor contractions** – Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold for 3 to 10 seconds, as instructed. Then, relax for 3 to 10 seconds.

## Exercise program guidelines

Include both quick and slow pelvic floor contractions in your exercise program. The quick contractions build muscle strength. The slow contractions build stamina. Each type of exercise targets and works specific nerves in your pelvic floor. Your exercise program will depend on your strength and ability to contract your pelvic floor. Patience is needed, and it is important not to overwork and tire your muscles. For best results, do these exercises, as instructed, every day.

- Start with 10 repetitions of the quick and slow contractions. Do these 4 times a day.
- Every week or 2, increase the number of repetitions by 5 (15, 20, 25) until you have reached 30, or a maximum of 120 repetitions of the quick contractions and 120 repetitions of the slow contractions in a day.

If you have stress incontinence, begin to tighten your pelvic floor at these times:

- When you feel a cough or sneeze coming
- When you laugh
- Before you stand up
- Before lifting objects or exerting yourself

If you have urgency or urge incontinence, try to do a few contractions to distract yourself until you can get to the bathroom. Remember, relaxing the pelvic floor completely after each contraction may be helpful. Your body can send false urge signals at times.

## Helpful hints

- Place your hand on your abdomen while doing the exercises. Your 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. It can be helpful to do this once in a while to make sure you identify the right muscles. However, do not do this on a regular basis. This works against your bladder’s normal contraction and release of urine. Do not do the exercises while emptying your bladder.

- Men may be able to identify a pelvic floor contraction. If a man does the exercise correctly while standing naked, the tip of the penis will pull slightly in and up.
- Women who are sexually active can contract their pelvic floor around their partner's penis, and their partner should feel the contraction. This is another way of knowing if your pelvic floor muscles are contracting.
- For the best results, do these exercises every day for 3 to 4 months. It takes time to build up muscle strength.

If you have any questions, ask your physician, nurse or physical therapist.