

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE EXERCISES FOR MEN

This handout gives basic information regarding pelvic floor muscle exercises (PFME's). If you follow written advice on this topic, it may not be as effective as an individual programme of PFME's formulated after an examination by a clinician trained in this specialty. During examination, the clinician will ensure you are tightening the correct muscles and estimate the strength of the muscle contraction and how quickly the muscle tires. They will set an individual programme for you to follow, and will supervise the effectiveness of your pelvic floor training programme. Therefore, if you follow the basic advice given here and do not have any improvement in your symptoms after 3 to 4 months, you should ask to be referred to your local Bladder and Bowel service. If the exercises are successful in reducing or curing your symptoms, continue the exercises on a daily basis for life.

What are PFME's for?

PFME's are carried out to prevent and treat involuntary urinary leakage on effort or exertion, including sporting activities, or on sneezing or coughing. They are also used for people with urinary urgency, with or without urinary leakage, as by tightening the pelvic floor muscles, the bladder relaxes and helps to reduce the feeling of urgency.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are an essential part of preparation before surgery for removal of the prostate gland for cancer (radical prostatectomy). They ensure that the pelvic floor muscles are in good condition and can help reduce urine leakage after the operation.

Where is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor muscles are a bowl shaped structure of muscles and ligaments attached to the pelvic bones and the tail bone, forming the support at the base of the abdomen for the bladder and lower bowel. The openings from these organs pass through the pelvic floor where the muscles wrap around the passages - the urethra (sometimes called the water pipe) from the bladder, and the rectum from the lower bowel.

What weakens the pelvic floor muscles?

Normally the pelvic floor muscles around the passages are strong enough to prevent leakage, but the muscles can be weakened as a result of:

- Surgery on the prostate gland
- Damage to the nerves of the pelvic floor by injury, surgery or radiotherapy
- Persistent constipation
- A chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Being generally unfit
- Some medical conditions
- Regularly lifting heavy loads at work or home

How to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

To begin, choose a quiet time and place so you can concentrate on learning the exercises correctly.

Sit, stand or lie down with your feet comfortably apart. You can do the exercises in any of these positions.

Relax and breathe normally.

Try not to tighten your buttocks, thighs or abdominal (tummy) muscles.

You need to learn to carry out both slow and fast exercises.

Concentrate and tighten the muscles around the back passage. Imagine you are trying not to pass wind. Then, **squeeze** and **lift** the muscles as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine. As you tighten the muscles, you will feel your scrotum and base of the penis move slightly upwards. You have now identified your pelvic floor muscles and by tightening both together, you have the foundation for improving the strength of your pelvic floor.

Slow exercise

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, lift and squeeze for as long as you can, then 'let go' and relax for a few seconds, then repeat. To begin with, you may only be able to hold this muscle contraction for a few seconds, and may only be able to repeat this a few times. As the muscles become stronger you will be able to hold for longer. Your aim is to hold for 10 seconds, repeated at least 8 times.

Fast exercise

In the same way, tighten and relax your pelvic floor muscles as before but much faster – about one per second for 10 seconds. With each contraction, your penis should twitch upwards.

You have the best chance of success if you carry out slow and fast contractions of your pelvic floor muscles as described, 3 times every day for at least three months.

The 'after dribble'

The 'after dribble' is common and embarrassing occurrence experienced by some men. It is a small leak from the water pipe after leaving the toilet which can result in a damp patch, especially noticeable on light coloured trousers. This can be prevented by tightening the pelvic floor muscles after fully emptying the bladder. The 'after dribble' may also be managed by the man placing his fingertips (three fingers wide) behind his scrotum and applying gentle pressure upwards and forwards to encourage the flow of urine along and down the water pipe, while the penis is pointing over the toilet. The penis should then be shaken or squeezed in the usual way. This should be repeated once to make sure the water pipe is completely empty.

Other helpful advice

- Once learned you can do the exercises anywhere, as no one will know you are doing them
- A busy lifestyle can mean you forget to do the exercises, so plan your programme and try to associate carrying out the exercises with an event so you remember
- When passing urine, do **not** try to stop the flow by tightening the pelvic floor muscles as this can result in the bladder not completely emptying
- To prevent or reduce urine leakage, squeeze the pelvic floor muscles tightly **at the same time** as you do any activity that usually causes urine leakage. This procedure is called 'The Knack'
- Avoid constipation and straining
- Avoid heavy lifting
- If overweight, aim to reduce your weight to an acceptable level
- A persistent cough can make it more likely that you leak urine. It is very important that you always tighten your pelvic floor muscles during any coughing and also seek advice from your doctor if you have a persistent cough
- Smoking can make a cough worse and also increases the risk of some cancers, including bladder cancer. If you would like help in stopping smoking speak to your doctor or other health professional