

Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor muscles are important because they help prevent stress incontinence (when you leak a few drops of urine when you cough, laugh or run). It's very common to feel you have no control over these muscles for a couple of days – maybe weeks – after the birth.

The pelvic floor muscles are a broad sling of muscles that stretch from the pubic bone at the front of your body to the base of your spine (coccyx) at the back. Ideally you'll have been doing pelvic floor exercises throughout your pregnancy. Now the more often you do the exercises, the better; and it's good to make them part of your daily routine. You'll be taught how to do them by a midwife or physiotherapist.

Remember you can do them anywhere and no one will notice! You should aim to do them several times a day.

If your pelvic floor muscles are weak you may find exercising them quite difficult at first. With frequent practice though, you will soon improve. If you continue to have problems, mention it to your GP or health visitor.

how to do the exercises

Try to use your pelvic floor muscles during everyday tasks such as getting out of bed.

Exercise 1 – Slow contractions

- Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind.
- At the same time, imagine that you are trying to stop the flow of urine.
- It will feel like squeezing shut and lifting the back and front passages.
- Start by trying to hold for three seconds. Rest for five seconds then repeat the exercise.
- Build up to holding for 10 seconds. Repeat up to 10 times. Do five sets per day.

Once you are able to hold for five seconds and repeat at least five times, then you can add exercise 2.

Exercise 2 – Fast contractions

- Squeeze and lift as in exercise 1.
- Let go straight away.
- Repeat 10 times.

Don't

- tighten your buttocks
- hold your breath
- squeeze your thighs together.

Don't stop the flow of urine midstream as an exercise as it may cause incomplete bladder emptying and increase the risk of infection.