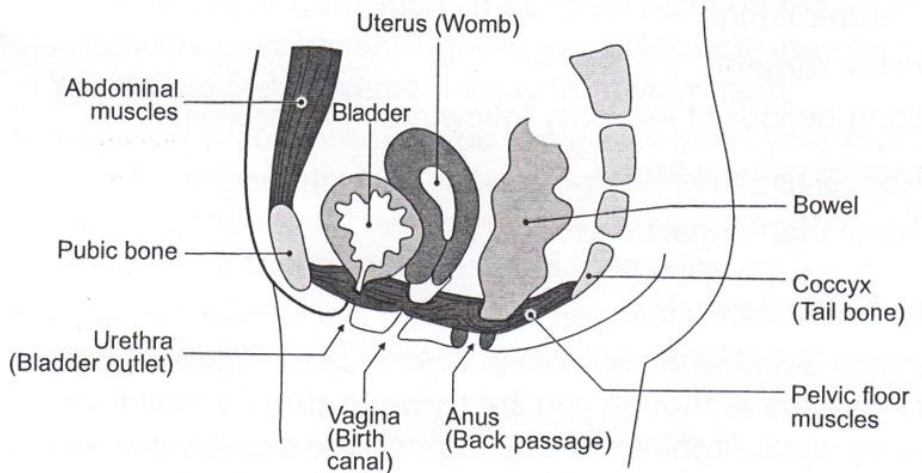


Overactive Pelvic Floor Muscles

Information for patients

What is your pelvic floor?

The floor of your pelvis is made up of layers of muscle called the pelvic floor. They are like an elastic hammock inside your body. They stretch from the pubic bone at the front, to the base of the spine and the coccyx (tail bone) at the back. The pelvic floor supports the bladder, the cervix and uterus (womb), and the bowel.



What is an overactive pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor muscles are like other muscles in the body; as such, they can suffer from excess tension and tighten when they are overworked.

Imagine holding your hand in a tight fist for many days, weeks or months. How sore would your hand be? This is what happens in the pelvic floor muscles; they hold tension which leads to pain.

Sometimes the muscles can develop areas of tension which can be extremely painful and can spread pain to other organs.

Where might I feel it?

When your pelvic floor muscles are overworked, you may feel a tenderness and deep ache in your pelvis. Pain can also be felt in other areas such as:

- Vagina
- Labia and/or vulva
- Anus
- Bladder
- Coccyx
- Groin
- Lower back
- Stomach.

It can also lead to various other symptoms such as:

- Bladder urgency and frequency
- Incontinence
- Pain during or after sex
- Bowel problems.

What causes an overactive pelvic floor?

Sometimes there is no explanation for why this has happened. Sometimes it can be triggered from other sources such as:

- Urine infection
- Thrush
- Stress
- Pelvic surgery
- Childbirth
- Trauma or abuse
- Endometriosis.

What can I do to help myself?

- Get checked out by your doctor to rule out other causes of your pain (e.g. infection)
- General relaxation of your whole body can help (e.g. Mindfulness)
- Abdominal deep breathing exercises
- Warm baths or heat pads on the area
- Take pain relief as prescribed by your doctor
- Massage, stretches and muscle release as taught by your physiotherapist can be very useful
- A reduction in aggravating factors until the pain is improved (such as cycling and sex).

Physiotherapy treatment

This may involve massage of the soft tissues, stretching of tight muscles (as in other parts of the body) and teaching of relaxation. The physiotherapist may also use biofeedback to help you learn about your muscles and their function.

The physiotherapist can teach you ways to help you understand and manage your pain better.

For further help and advice:

www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com

This website has been developed by Maeve Whelan who is a specialist physiotherapist working in Dublin.

www.pelvicpainhelp.com

This website is about the Wise-Anderson protocol which has been found to be very successful in the USA.

www.pelvicpain.org.uk

A UK based support network for patients suffering from pelvic pain.