

Prioritising pelvic health

Information and Resources

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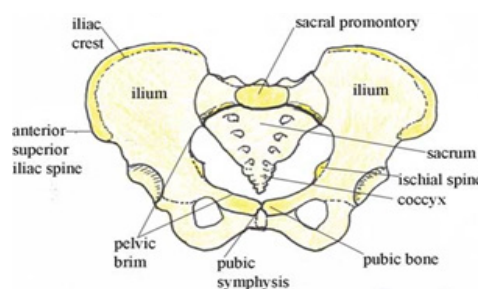
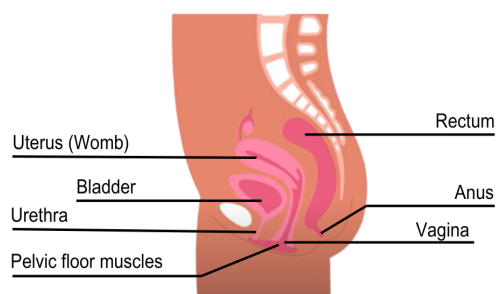


Watch the ALLIANCE and Scottish Government webinar on Prioritising Pelvic Health here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1067k4G3Jl>

Find out more about a range of pelvic health topics at NHS Inform:
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/middle-years-around-25-to-50-years/#pelvic-health>

The Pelvis

The pelvis is a bony bowl-shaped structure found at the base of the torso. It contains the pelvic organs, such as the uterus, bowel and the bladder, and pelvic openings such as the vagina, urethra and anus.



Pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor is a large group of muscles at the base of your pelvis. They work together to support the pelvic organs, and are important for continence and sexual function.

All bladder and bowel functions need good pelvic floor muscles. For example, when you need to go to the toilet, you use your pelvic floor muscles to prevent any leaks. Then, you will fully relax them to pass urine (go for a wee) when you physically get to the toilet.

You can find more information below about the pelvis and pelvic floor muscles:

NHS Inform – Pelvic Floor Muscles: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/middle-years-around-25-to-50-years/pelvic-health/pelvic-floor-muscles/>

Pelvic Floor Muscles Explained (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-12xUd-dhYQ&t=8s>



Looking after your own pelvic health

There are some things we can all do to support good pelvic health:

- Staying active – low impact exercises may work best such as walking, cycling, swimming or pilates
- Keeping your weight within a healthy range, as this reduces pressure on the pelvic floor
- Staying well hydrated
- Avoiding caffeine, and limiting fizzy drinks and alcohol which can irritate the bladder and bowel
- Trying not to strain on the toilet – ensure you're eating enough fibre and drinking enough fluid
- Working with healthcare professionals to minimise any chronic coughs
- Stopping smoking
- Taking up routine screening such as cervical smear test and bowel screening
- Exercising your pelvic floor muscles regularly

You can find more information:

On keeping active - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active/>

Eating well - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/food-and-nutrition/>

Stopping smoking - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/how-to-stop-smoking/>

Cervical screening - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/screening/cervical-screening-smear-test/>

Pelvic floor exercises

There are a few different ways to exercise the pelvic floor. Everyone should exercise their pelvic floor muscles regularly, as you would with any muscle. It's never too late to start and pelvic floor exercises can improve symptoms. If you have been referred to a physiotherapist they can work with you to tailor exercises to your specific needs.

To contract the pelvic floor you draw up at the bottom, like you're stopping wind, and pull up at the front like you're stopping urine.

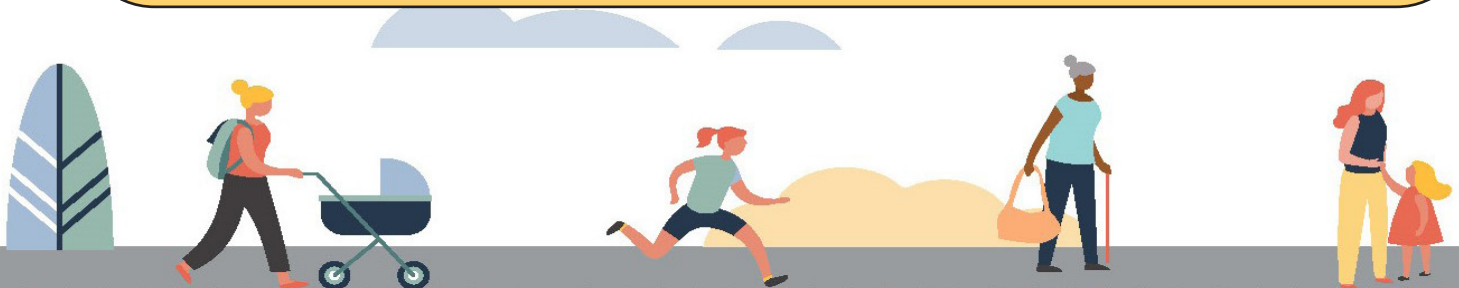
There are two types of exercises to practice - "fasts" and "holds". For the "fasts" pull your muscles in as described above and then let go. Try for 10 repetitions but you may need to build up to this. For the "holds" pull your muscles in, and try and hold on (time yourself to work out how long you can hold for), relax for a few seconds and repeat. Aim to do 10 holds, but most people need to build up to this. Try and do both exercises 3 – 6 times per day. Remember to stay relaxed, avoid squeezing your tummy muscles or buttocks and don't hold your breath!

You can find tips on pelvic floor exercises here:

NHS Inform: insights from clinicians (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z5DZe1e-H2Q>

POGP: How to do pelvic floor exercises https://thepogp.co.uk/patients/pelvic_health_advice/pelvic_floor_muscles.aspx

Squeezy app <https://squeezyapp.com/>



What can affect the pelvic floor

Your pelvic floor muscles should be kept strong and active, just like any other muscle. Life events like having a baby or ageing can impact your pelvic floor muscles.

People may experience one or multiple concerns with their pelvic floor. This can include:

- Stress urinary incontinence – leaking urine when laughing, coughing, running, having an orgasm etc
- Frequent urination or urgency of urination
- Needing to urinate multiple times at night
- Leaking poo
- Urgently needing to poo
- Difficulty holding onto wind
- Painful bladder syndrome
- Vaginal prolapse
- Painful sex

You can find more information about some issues with the pelvic floor here, as well as how they may be treated:

NHS Inform – Urinary incontinence <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/middle-years-around-25-to-50-years/pelvic-health/urinary-incontinence-in-women/>

NHS Inform – Pelvic organ prolapse <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/sexual-and-reproductive/pelvic-organ-prolapse/>

NHS Inform – Urinary Tract Infection <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/kidneys-bladder-and-prostate/urinary-tract-infection-uti/>

NHS Inform – Bowel incontinence <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/bowel-incontinence/>

POGP - Bladder and bowel incontinence https://thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/womens_health/bladder_bowel_incontinence.aspx

POGP – Pelvic pain https://thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/womens_health/persistent_pelvic_pain.aspx

Getting support

If you are experiencing problems with your pelvic floor it is important you visit your GP. Treatment will depend on what symptoms you experience, and how they impact your life. Some treatments include lifestyle changes, bladder training, specific pelvic floor exercises, and medication. Your healthcare practitioner will discuss options with you and you'll make decisions together .

You may be referred to a pelvic health physiotherapist who will work closely with you to understand your symptoms, your priorities, and your lifestyle.

Although it may feel embarrassing, it's important that you share all symptoms with health care professionals so that they can understand the full scope of your concerns and give you the best possible support. Remember also to tell your physio about your hobbies and interests and any limitations caused by your symptoms – their aim is to help you live your life to the fullest.



You can find further information about getting support here:
It's OK to Ask <https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/its-ok-to-ask/>

Promoting continence with physiotherapy https://thepogp.co.uk/_userfiles/pages/files/POGP-Continence_0.pdf

Find a physio in your local area <https://thepogp.co.uk/patients/physiotherapists/>

FAQs

Should I go to the GP for medication for urinary issues, or see a physiotherapist first?

If you have any symptoms speak to your GP in the first instance. They will ask you some questions to understand what may be causing your symptoms and may firstly look to rule out other things that could be causing your symptoms, such as a urinary tract infection. Your GP can provide help and advice and, depending on your symptoms they may refer you, or ask you to self-refer, to a physiotherapist.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/middle-years-around-25-to-50-years/pelvic-health/urinary-incontinence-in-women/>

How do I access a pelvic health physiotherapist?

You can visit your GP and request a referral to NHS pelvic health physiotherapy if you experience symptoms. In some health board areas it is possible to self refer directly to a pelvic health physiotherapist, information can usually be found on your health boards website.

You can also access a physiotherapist privately. You can find information about private specialists by asking your local NHS physio team, or by visiting here: <https://thepogp.co.uk/patients/physiotherapists/>

When should women start doing pelvic floor exercises?

You can begin exercising your pelvic floor at any time, and you do not have to wait until you develop any concerns. It is appropriate for teenagers to exercise their pelvic floor muscles.

Should I do pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy?

Yes, you can find more information in your Ready Steady Baby book or online but if you're unsure you can ask your Midwife or Physio for guidance.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/ready-steady-baby/>

What is the impact of a caesarean on the pelvic floor?

There are lots of factors that affect your pelvic floor and each pregnancy and delivery are different. To discuss your personal situation speak to your Midwife and Physio.

How do I know if I have a prolapse?

Some women with a pelvic organ prolapse don't have any symptoms at all. The condition may only be discovered during an internal examination for another reason. For example, during a cervical screening test (smear test). Other women will experience symptoms and it's normal for symptoms to feel more or less severe at different times of the day.

Some noticeable symptoms of a vaginal prolapse include a feeling of a bulge or something coming down the vagina; a bulge coming out the vagina; urinary urgency or difficulties emptying your bowel. Some people will notice a change when they try and insert a tampon.

Some noticeable symptoms of a bowel prolapse includes a feeling of pressure at your anus (where you poo from), and a bulge coming out of your anus.



Can I have a vaginal prolapse if I've had a hysterectomy?

Yes. This is called a 'vault' prolapse and can happen after a total hysterectomy where the new 'top' of the vagina bulges downwards.

If I need to pee during the night, should I go straight away or wait till I really need to go?

It's perfectly normal to have a pee overnight, frequency will vary with age, but it can be a problem if we can't get back to sleep or it's really disrupting our night.

Lots of things such as fluid intake; timing of drinks (close to bedtime for example); types of fluid; medical conditions, medications and the quality of our sleep can all impact.

Make sure you're drinking plenty of non-irritating fluids, like water (1.5 – 2 litres), during the day rather than "catching up in the evening". Avoid caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol which can irritate the bladder and bowel. No fluids (except to take medications) 3 hours before bed is a good rule of thumb and making sure that any health conditions which may affect you overnight are well controlled.

You may need to start practising waiting to pee (deferring is the medical term) during the day and then start working on this at night. Build up your confidence and then you can start trying to go back to sleep.

Does vaginal dryness impact pelvic health, and how to treat?

Vaginal dryness also called vaginal atrophy is thinning, drying and inflammation of the vaginal walls that can occur when your body has less oestrogen.

The vaginal tissues need oestrogen to be firm and supportive. When we reach menopause our oestrogen levels drop, and this may cause vaginal dryness, but it can also thin the tissues of the vagina and cause some issues with pelvic floor and bladder function.

If your vagina becomes dry, painful or itchy as a result of the menopause, your GP or Specialist Nurse or Physiotherapist can prescribe oestrogen treatment that's put directly into your vagina as a pessary, cream or vaginal ring. You can also use over-the-counter vaginal moisturisers or lubricants in addition to, or instead of, vaginal oestrogen which may help.

Is there evidence that supplements work for pelvic floor health e.g vitamin E?

There are many different supplements out there, as well as some traditional remedies. Whilst there is often not scientific evidence to support these, some people do report that they find them helpful. If you're thinking of starting a supplement it's a good idea to check with someone in your health care team, as it's important to make sure that you aren't taking something that could interact with your prescribed medicines.



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