Pelvic Floor Muscle Training and Bladder Training

Urogynaecology Physiotherapy Service Patient Information Leaflet
What are pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles span the bottom of the pelvis.

When the muscles are healthy they provide support for the pelvic organs and help to control bladder and bowel functioning.

The muscles also support the vaginal walls, preventing prolapse and help to increase pleasure during sexual activity.

What causes weak pelvic floor muscles?

There are many possible causes of pelvic floor muscle weakness, for example:

- Pregnancy and childbirth.
- Frequent episodes of constipation or persistent straining to empty the bowel.
- Persistent cough.
- Being overweight (BMI above 30).
- Menopausal / hormonal changes.
- Repeated heavy lifting.
- Long periods of inactivity due to illness or pelvic surgery.
- Ageing.
- High impact sports.

What are the symptoms of weak pelvic floor muscles?

- Urinary leakage.
- Not being able to reach the toilet in time.
- Vaginal heaviness or,
- The feeling of something ‘coming down’.
Pelvic Floor Muscle Training

It is important to exercise your pelvic floor muscles to help your bladder and bowel control. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and at the same time trying to stop yourself from passing urine. It should feel like a ‘squeeze and lift’ inside.

- Start in a lying position. Swiftly tighten your pelvic floor muscles feeling a ‘squeeze and lift’ of the back passage (anus) and then front passages (vagina and urethra).

- **Tighten the back and front passages together as strongly as you can but do not hold your breath.**

- Hold for as many seconds as you can manage, building up to 10 seconds over time.

- Relax the muscles for 10 seconds then repeat up to 10 times, or until you are tired.

- Exercise the pelvic floor muscles 3 times a day; twice in lying and once in sitting doing a ‘squeeze and lift’ 10 times holding each tightening for a count of 10 seconds if you can (10 x 10).

- **Try not to be doing anything else when you exercise the pelvic floor muscles - they will get stronger quicker.**
• Use your pelvic floor muscles in daily life by learning the ‘Knack’ manoeuvre. That is to ‘squeeze and lift’ your pelvic floor muscles before and during activities such as coughing, sneezing, lifting, bending and any other activities that increase the pressure on the pelvic floor.

• **Do not exercise the pelvic floor by stopping and starting the flow of urine when you are on the toilet.**

**Pelvic Floor Muscle Training Summary**

1. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles, ‘squeeze and lift’ for up to 10 seconds, 10 times in lying and sitting positions 3 times a day.

2. Learn the ‘Knack’ manoeuvre. This is to tighten the pelvic floor muscles before and during activities that increase abdominal pressure i.e. coughing, sneezing and lifting.

3. Squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles a little when standing and walking.

**If you practise Pelvic Floor Muscle Training as above you should notice an improvement in 3-5 months.**

**Bladder Functioning**

• Normal fluid intake in a 24-hour period should be 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid a day.

• Your bladder should need emptying every 3-4 hours, and possibly once a night if you are over 50.

• Pelvic floor muscle training helps maintain normal bladder functioning.

**When do you need to train your bladder?**

You cannot put off the first urge to empty your bladder (urgency).

• You are going more frequently to the toilet due to this urge (frequency). You are leaking on the way to the toilet (urgency incontinence).
What can you do to help train your bladder?

• Caffeine can irritate the bladder making you want to empty your bladder before it is full.

• Tea, coffee, hot chocolate and green tea contain caffeine.

• Slowly omitting caffeine from your diet will help your bladder relax and enable you to have more time to reach the toilet. It can also help to reduce the number of visits you make to the toilet. This is done by:

  1. Substituting the last caffeinated drink of the day with either a glass of water or decaffeinated drink.

  2. Continue on a daily basis to substitute until you have omitted all bladder stimulants from your diet. This may take a week to achieve.

  3. Never cut out all caffeine products at once as you may experience headaches or lethargy, the process must be gradual.

  4. Citrus and blackcurrant juices and fizzy drinks also irritate your bladder. These should also be omitted from your diet. Alcohol should also be minimised.

  5. Nicotine also irritates the bladder, so reducing or stopping smoking can also help improve bladder symptoms.

How to Bladder Train

• When you have the urge to empty your bladder firstly keep calm. The more anxious you become the more likely you are to leak urine.

• Remain in the position you are in or sit down if you can.

• Take 3 slow deep breaths.
• Wait for 1 minute for the urge to disappear. You may find distracting your mind can help, such as counting.

• Once the urge has gone continue with your activities to try and increase the time span between urination and improve the capacity of your bladder.

• Never rush to the toilet mid-urge as you will probably leak urine.

• Practise the above technique every time you have the urge to pass urine.

• If you leak when rising from your bed at night when you have an urge to pass urine, use this technique.

• If you are being awoken in the night by an urge to urinate try the technique, and then try to go back to sleep.

• Remember never to go to the toilet just in case.

• In time your bladder will be able to hold more urine and the urgency will ease.

• Sit down on the toilet whenever possible to pass urine.

• Do not hover over the toilet, as your bladder will not empty properly.

**Bladder Training can take up to 6 Weeks to be Beneficial**

**General Advice**

• Avoid constipation by having a good diet of fruit, vegetables, fibre, and water.

• Remember your posture, fitness level and weight play a great part in preventing incontinence symptoms.

• Stopping smoking can also help to improve your bladder symptoms.
Further advice is available from a Specialist Physiotherapist.

If the advice in this booklet is not beneficial please seek help from your GP.

If you experience pain or discomfort or have any serious concerns contact your GP.
Other sources of information:

Physiotherapy Department
Telephone: 01253 953512

Hospital switchboard
Telephone: 01253 30000

Patient Relations Department
The Patient Relations Department offer impartial advice and deal with any concerns or complaints the Trust receives.

You can contact them via tel: 01253 955589 or by email: bfwh.patientrelations@nhs.net

You can also write to us at: Patient Relations Department, Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Blackpool Victoria Hospital, Whinney Heys Road, Blackpool FY3 8NR

Further information is available on our website: www.bfwh.nhs.uk

If you’d like a large print, audio, Braille or a translated version of this booklet then please call: 01253 955520

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