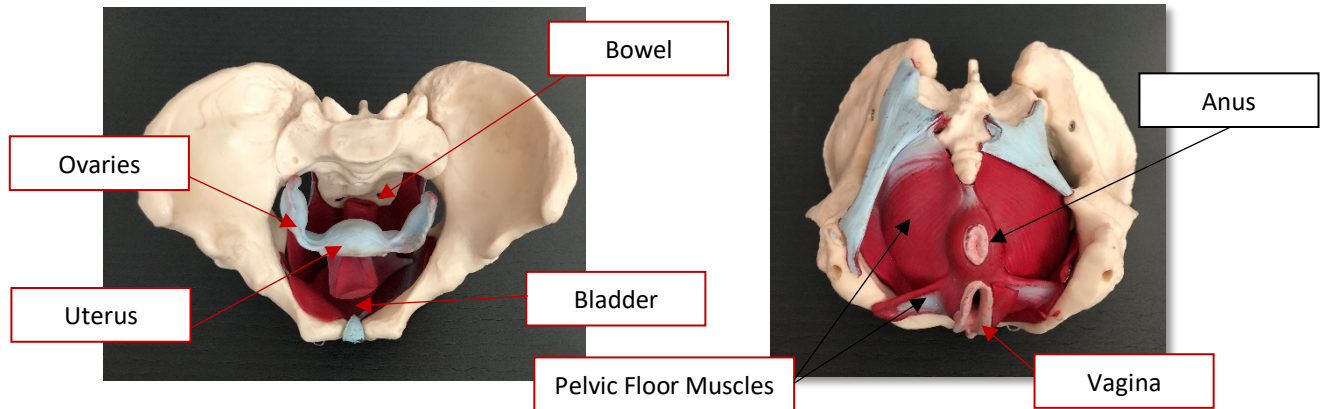


PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE EXERCISES

What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles (PFMs)?

The PFMs are layers of muscle and tissue that form a hammock like structure attaching from the pubic bones in the front of the pelvis to the tail bone at the back. The PFMs support the organs of the pelvis – the bladder, uterus (womb) and bowel. The urethra (the tube leaving the bladder), the vagina (birth canal) and bowel (back passage) pass through the PFMs. The PFMs have an integral role in maintaining bladder and bowel control as well as sexual sensation.



What causes weakening of the Pelvic Floor Muscles?

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Hormonal changes during – teens, reproductive years, peri and post-menopausal
- Persistent lifting of a heavy weight – children, heavy weight bearing gym work outs, work related lifts
- Overweight – ideal BMI < 26
- Poor overall fitness
- Chronic / persistent coughing
- Constipation – straining to empty your bowel

Signs and symptoms of dysfunctional Pelvic Floor Muscles (weak or high tone or strength)

Bladder Incontinence:

Stress: (SUI) is the involuntary loss of urine with a cough, laugh, sneeze or jump

Urge: (UI) is when the urge to empty your bladder occurs and you are unable to hold off emptying, leaks occur

Urgency: a feeling or needing to empty your bladder (more frequently) with a high level of urgency

Mixed: a combination of the above

Bowel Incontinence: the loss of wind or faeces from the bowel

Pelvic gridle pain – pain associated with daily functional activities such as walking, sitting, standing or with sexual intercourse

Pelvic Organ Prolapse: where one or more of the organs supported by the PFMs may descend down in the pelvis or even out of the pelvis causing a bladder, bowel, uterine or gut prolapse

Why are Pelvic floor muscle exercises important?

It is estimated that as high as 1:3 women in their lifetime, may develop signs or symptoms associated with PFM weakness and or dysfunction. As these muscles are not cosmetic and affect our outward body's appearance, they are often overlooked and forgotten until a problem presents. Exercising these muscles early and consistently in life may prevent you from leakage, pelvic pain and or prolapse later on in life. So start now, it's never too late!

How to identify and contract your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

1. In a sitting or lying position relax your abdominal, thigh, and buttocks muscles. As you may contract these accessory muscle groups thinking you are engaging your PFMs - when you are not!
2. Contract / tighten the muscles around your back anal passage, as if you are trying to stop wind or gas escaping or to hold off from emptying your bowels. You should be able to contract these muscles with no contraction of the accessory muscles mentioned above.
3. Now contract the front PFMs. To do this think of trying to stop the flow of urine mid-stream, then restart it. Contract and release. ONLY do this a few times until your able to identify the feeling of these muscles. Do not do this more than once a week as this may cause interference with normal bladder functioning.

If you are finding the above exercises of closing off and squeezing the back and or the front areas of your PFMs difficult please contact, you're your Women' Health physiotherapist to assist you in more easily identifying and subsequently strengthening your PFMs.

Pelvic Floor Muscles Exercises

If you are able to feel the contraction of the back and front of the PFM then:

1. Contract the anus (back), and urethra (front) passages at once and "squeeze and lift" these muscles upwards inside your pelvis. Picture closing of the "lift doors" (the passages) and the lift now being pulled up by a lift cable upwards inside of you towards your central core or belly.
2. Hold the contraction aiming to building up to 10 seconds hold and then release – let go of the muscles.
3. Rest for 10 seconds to allow your muscles to recover and repeat.
4. The goal is to squeeze and lift for 10 seconds and rest for 10 seconds, then repeat.
5. You must maintain your natural breathing pattern – do not hold your breath even when trying to hold to contraction. If your breathing alters, stop the exercise, and start again when you can breathe naturally.
6. Repeat as many times as you are able with a natural breathing pattern. A maximum of 10 x reps is suggested to build muscles strength.
7. Also do these contractions in a fast pattern as well – lift for 2 seconds and release for 2 seconds, repeat for 10.
8. Aim to do this routine of slow and fast PFMs contractions 4-5 times a day. Approximately 30 repetitions a day of fast and slow contractions.

Be mindful to:

Do them daily

DO NOT breathe hold

DO NOT push or bear down

DO NOT squeeze abdominal, buttock and or thighs when doing your pelvic floor muscle exercise.

Do seek advice from your Women's Health Physiotherapist, who will instruct you with other aides and techniques to recruit and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Make pelvic floor muscle exercises part of your daily lives every day of your life! They are fun to do.

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