

♥ Pilates ♥ Keep-fit ♥ Pilates ♥ *fit for life, your life*

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES (for Men and Women)

They are responsible for supporting the pelvic organs – the bladder, bowel and womb, especially when standing; they contract when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Plus keeping your pelvis and hips stable.

WHAT IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

Layers of muscles which stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone to the coccyx (tailbone). These supportive muscles are called the pelvic floor.

Women's – helps hold the bladder, womb and bowel in place, and to close the bladder outlet and back passage.

Men's – pelvic floor supports the bladder and the bowel.

HOW DOES THE PELVIC FLOOR WORK?

The muscles of the pelvic floor are kept firm and slightly tense to stop leakage of urine from the bladder or faeces from the bowel. When you pass water or have a bowel motion the pelvic floor muscles relax. Afterwards they tighten again to restore control.

Pelvic floor muscles can become weak and sag due to; childbirth, some prostate surgery, lack of exercise, the menopause or just getting older. Weak muscles give you less control, and you may leak urine or pass wind, especially when exercising or when you cough, sneeze or laugh.

HOW CAN PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES HELP?

Pelvic floor exercises strengthen these muscles so that they once again give support. This will improve your bladder control and improve or stop leakage of urine. Like any other muscles in the body, the more you use them, the stronger they become.

LEARNING TO DO PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

It's important to learn to do the exercises in the right way, and to check from time to time that you are still doing them correctly.

1. Sit comfortably with your knees & feet hip distance apart. Now imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind from the bowel. To do this you must squeeze the muscles around the back passage. Try lifting and squeezing that muscle and you should be able to feel the muscle move. Your buttocks and legs should not move at all. You should be aware of the skin around the back passage tightening and being pulled up and away from your chair.
2. Next time you go to the toilet try to stop the stream of urine, try this 'stop test' about halfway through emptying your bladder. Once you have stopped the flow of urine, relax again and empty the bladder completely. You may only be able to slow down the stream rather than stop it. Don't worry your muscles will improve and strengthen with time and exercise.

However, this is only a test and you should NOT perform your pelvic floor exercises in this way as a rule. It is not good to actually stop the flow of urine or stop passing stools.

TIPS TO HELP YOU:

1. Get into the habit of doing your exercises with things you do regularly – every time you touch water in the home, every time you answer the phone or if you are waiting for the kettle to boil, wringing out the dishcloth in the sink, in the adverts of Coronation Street whatever you do often.
2. Try to do the exercises once a day initially. Then once you feel confident that you can perform the exercises correctly then gradually increase to several times a day.
3. Use the pelvic floor muscles when you are afraid that you might leak urine, pull up the muscles before you sneeze or lift something heavy. Your control will gradually improve.
4. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water a day. And don't get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'. Go only when you feel your bladder is full.
5. Watch your weight, extra weight puts extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles.
6. You should perform pelvic floor exercises every day for the rest of your life – like any other muscle if you stop working it the muscle will weaken.

PRACTISING YOUR EXERCISES

1. Sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart. Slowly tighten and pull up the pelvic floor muscles. Hold tightened for at least 5 seconds if you can, then relax. Repeat at least 5 times (Slow pull ups)
2. Now pull the muscles up quickly and tightly, and then relax immediately. Repeat at least 5 times. (Fast pull ups)
3. Concentrate, once you lose your focus you may find the muscles relax and, don't hold your breath – breathe!
4. Do these 2 exercises 5 slow and 5 fast at least 10 times every day.
5. As the muscles get stronger, you will find that you can hold for longer than 5 seconds, and that you can do a few more than 5 repetitions without the muscles getting tired.
6. It takes time for exercise to make the muscles stronger. You are unlikely to notice improvements for several weeks.

So, stick at it!