Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises and Advice For Men

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Introduction

The pelvic floor is made up of muscles which hold the bladder and bowel in place. These help to stop leaks from the bladder and bowel. Strong pelvic floor muscles are also important to help maintain an erection and may prevent premature ejaculation.

Men of all ages can suffer from incontinence or erectile dysfunction. Prostate surgery and pelvic radiotherapy can affect the pelvic floor and its delicate nerve supply. Other causes are poor physical fitness, being overweight, chronic constipation, chronic cough and prolonged heavy lifting. These causes can all lead to poor muscle tone and excess strain on the muscles and their nerve supply.
The basic pelvic floor exercise

Make sure you are sitting or lying in a comfortable position. Now, draw up into your back passage as if stopping wind. At the same time, draw up at the front as if stopping the flow of urine or trying to shorten/draw your penis up and inwards. The movement is one of lift and squeeze. This is called a pelvic floor muscle contraction.

The pelvic floor muscle exercise programme

Now that you are able to do the basic pelvic floor exercise, you can follow this programme to gradually tone up your muscles.

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as strongly as you are able and hold for as many seconds as you can (up to a maximum of 10 seconds).
- Release this contraction and rest for 4 seconds.
- Now repeat the pelvic floor muscle contraction as many times as you can (up to a maximum of 10 repetitions) - remembering to rest for 4 seconds between each lift.
- Aim to do at least 4 sets of exercises each day.
- Build up gradually, increasing how many seconds you can hold for (up to a maximum of 10 seconds) and how many repetitions you can do (up to a maximum of 10 repetitions), so that eventually you can do 10 repetitions with a 10 second hold, 4 times a day.
- Try not to pull in your stomach excessively, squeeze your legs together, or tighten your buttocks and do not hold your breath.
Once you feel confident performing these strong, sustained contractions, you can add some quick contractions.

- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles and then let go. Repeat this up to a maximum of 10 times. Quick contractions will help your muscles react quickly when you laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise or lift.
- Do the quick contractions after you have done each set of sustained contractions.
- Make sure that you let your muscles fully relax after each long and short contraction, before repeating the squeeze up

This programme is designed to build up the strength and endurance of the pelvic floor muscles, so that they will be able to work harder and longer.

**NB: Do not practise stopping the flow of urine when you are actually emptying your bladder as this can cause bladder problems.**

**Tips to help you**

Get into the habit of doing your exercises at times in the day when you have a few minutes. For example, before getting up in the morning and before going to sleep at night. The exercise can be performed lying, sitting and standing.

If you are unsure that you are exercising the right muscle, place your fingertips against the skin just behind the scrotum. When you contract your pelvic floor muscles, you will feel them tighten away from your fingers and your scrotum should lift slightly.

After urinating, tighten your pelvic floor muscles strongly to empty the last drops of urine out. This may help to stop dribbling after emptying your bladder.
If you are sexually active, tighten your pelvic floor muscles during intercourse to maintain the quality of your erection.

Use the pelvic floor muscles when you are afraid you might leak. Pull up the muscles quickly and strongly before you sneeze, cough, lift something heavy or rise from sitting.

Drink normally, at least 3 pints (1.5 litres) each day and avoid too much tea, coffee or cola (caffeine drinks). Don’t get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'. Go only when you feel that your bladder is full. Going frequently without the need to go will make your bladder smaller.

Watch your weight - extra weight puts extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles. Try to avoid being constipated - the extra strain needed puts more stress on your pelvic floor. Try to stop or reduce smoking cigarettes - regular coughing puts a strain on the pelvic floor.

Once you have regained control of your bladder, don’t forget your pelvic floor. Continue to do your pelvic floor exercises twice each day to ensure that the problem does not come back. You can do pelvic floor exercises wherever you are - nobody need know what you are doing!

Useful Resources

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org
www.prostatecanceruk.org
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