

feet on a small block 4 - 6 inches high (eg a 2-pack toilet roll). To open your bowels, gently push down into your back passage, using your tummy muscles.

### Drinks

Many people drink less to try to reduce their bladder problems. This can, however, make symptoms even worse in the long term. You should drink around eight cups or glasses of fluid a day (which is 3-4 pints, or 1½ litres).

If you have difficulty holding your water, try to avoid drinks containing caffeine, citrus fruits (orange, grapefruit, etc), and alcohol. Try instead decaffeinated tea or coffee, water, milk, cranberry juice, herbal or fruit teas, or non-citrus fruit juices.

### Caffeine

Caffeine acts as a stimulant to your urinary tract, making you need to pass water more frequently and more urgently. It is found mainly in tea, coffee, cola and chocolate. Cut down on caffeine gradually, for two weeks to see if it makes a difference to your symptoms. Caffeine stays in your blood for up to five hours so if getting up at night to pass water is a problem, avoid caffeine for five hours before bedtime.

### Weight

Being overweight puts additional strain on your pelvic floor muscles, so getting down to your correct weight could make a considerable improvement to your symptoms.

### Smoking

Smoking makes you more likely to suffer from pelvic floor weakness, especially if you have a 'smoker's cough', as this puts extra strain on the muscles.

For more information, please contact the Women's Health Team:

Doncaster Royal Infirmary  
Physiotherapy Department  
Tel: 01302 553135 or 01302 366666 bleep 1365

Bassetlaw Hospital  
Physiotherapy Department  
Tel: 01909 502302.

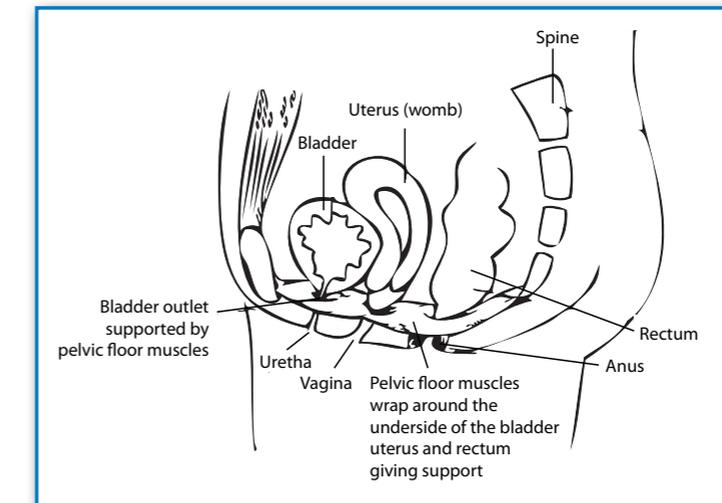
This information may be available in other languages and formats, on request. Please contact the Patient Advice & Liaison Service on (01302) 553140.

Diagram reference - [www.bissy.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.bissy.scot.nhs.uk)

### PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

The pelvic floor muscles form the base of the pelvis, running like a broad sling from the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis, to the coccyx at the back. The functions of the pelvic floor are:

- supporting the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus and bowel) to prevent prolapse
- controlling the outlets from the pelvic organs (urethra, vagina, and anus) to prevent leaking of urine or faeces
- enhancing sexual fulfilment.



### Pelvic floor weakness

Weakness of the pelvic floor muscles can affect any body male or female, young or old. Causes include:

- pregnancy and childbirth
- chronic constipation

- being overweight
- hormonal changes at the menopause
- chronic cough
- persistent heavy lifting
- long periods of inactivity/lack of exercise
- the natural ageing process.

### Symptoms

The symptoms of pelvic floor muscle weakness can include:

- leakage of urine with coughing, sneezing, laughing, jumping, sudden movements, etc
- frequent and sudden urges to pass urine
- leaking before getting to the toilet
- leaking of faeces/soiling of underwear, and difficulty controlling wind, a feeling of heaviness inside as though something is 'coming down'
- reduced satisfaction during intercourse.

### Exercise

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are very effective in treating these problems. Physiotherapists specialising in women's health make sure the pelvic floor muscles are working correctly, assess their strength, and design an appropriate exercise programme.

### How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises

- 1 in sitting or lying, imagine you are trying to stop your flow of urine, and at the same time trying to hold in wind
- 2 you should feel a 'squeeze and lift', as if closing and drawing up the front and back passages. This is a pelvic floor contraction
- 3 hold for as long as you can (up to 10 seconds) then let go and relax for a few seconds
- 4 repeat this as many times as you can, up to a maximum of 10 times

### CLINICAL THERAPY

- 5 follow this by doing up to 10 fast contractions
- 6 as a result of practice, your muscle strength will improve. As you are able, gradually build up the holds and repetitions until you can hold for 10 seconds, 10 times.

### Doing the exercises correctly

It is important that these exercises are performed correctly, so that only the pelvic floor muscles are working. Check that you are not:

- holding your breath
- tightening your buttocks
- squeezing your legs together
- pulling in your tummy muscles too much (although you may feel a slight tightening of your lower tummy muscles).

These exercises can be done in any position, anywhere. Nothing on the outside of your body is moving, so nobody knows that you are doing them.

Do your pelvic floor muscle exercises six times daily. The difficult part of the exercises is remembering to do them. The more dedicated you are with the exercises, the more successful you will be.

To help yourself remember, develop a 'memory link', put a sticker on the fridge/kettle/computer, do them after going to the toilet or when you have a drink, etc.

### Progressing the exercises

Progress the exercises by doing them standing up. Also tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold them while you lift, cough, sneeze, blow your nose, etc. This technique is called the 'knack'.

Your physiotherapist will advise you about progressing your exercises in other ways.

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### In future

You will need to keep doing the exercises this often for three months or more. They should then be continued daily for the rest of your life, because the muscles will weaken with further pregnancies, the menopause, and general ageing.

### Other Important Factors

#### Frequency

Avoid emptying your bladder more than every two hours (around six times a day), as this can reduce the bladder capacity. Train your bladder to wait longer. When you feel an urgent need to go:

- stand still, keep calm and relax
- contract your pelvic floor muscles
- sit on something hard, such as a chair arm or rolled up towel
- distract yourself
- wait 10 - 20 seconds for the urgency to pass
- walk to the toilet.

Do not get into the habit of going 'just in case'!

#### Complete emptying

When using the toilet make sure you empty your bladder completely as urine left in the bladder can cause irritation and inflammation. Lean forward or rock your pelvis to see if this gets rid of any more urine.

#### Constipation

Straining due to constipation stretches and weakens the pelvic floor muscles. Avoid constipation by ensuring adequate fluid intake and eating a sensible, balanced diet. See your GP if necessary.

#### Opening your bowels

Get into the correct position to open your bowels. You should be relaxed, with your knees higher than your hips, by supporting your

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