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Pelvic floor exercises for Women

Pelvic Floor Muscles

These are a group of muscles which stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone at the front to the coccyx at the back. These muscles support the bladder, urethra, vagina, uterus and bowel. The pelvic floor has three openings in the female, the urethra, vagina and the anus. Three muscle sphincters which encircle these openings act as valves to control the flow of urine and faeces. Usually these muscles act as a group, squeezing and relaxing together. The pelvic floor muscles are always slightly tense and the sphincters are normally closed. When urine is passed or the bowel opened, the muscle floor relaxes and the sphincter opens. Afterwards the muscles contract again and the sphincters close.

Pelvic floor muscles are therefore important for urinary continence, faecal continence and sexual enjoyment.

Locating your pelvic floor muscles

There are a number of ways to find your pelvic floor muscles and any or all of these can be tried:

- Go to the toilet and start to void. Once the stream of urine has started, try and stop it. If you can slow the stream of urine, even slightly, you are using the right muscles. However you should be able to completely stop the flow.
- Lie down and insert a finger or fingers into the vagina. Try to squeeze around the finger/s with vaginal muscles. Movement should be detectable.
- Imagine you are in a crowded place and suddenly feel as if you are about to pass wind. Try to squeeze your anal muscles to prevent this from happening.
- Sit forward on a chair and place your feet and knees wide apart. Place your elbows on your knees and lean forwards. Your pelvic floor should be in touch with the seat now. Close your eyes and imagine that you want to stop yourself from passing wind or imagine that you have diarrhoea and wish to stop that. Squeeze the muscles tightly around your back and front passages and lift your pelvic floor up and away from the chair.

Don't worry too much if you are squeezing the back passage rather than your front. It is impossible to work one without the other at this stage. When trying to find a new muscle, especially a weak one, most people tighten other muscles too. There is no need to do this, hold your breath or make any facial expressions. None of this helps. Do not tighten abdominal muscles but try and relax all these others and continue breathing.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

First of all find out how long you can maintain pelvic floor muscle contractions. You should be aiming at a strong muscle contraction lasting about 10 seconds. At least 5 seconds rest needs to be allowed between contractions with about one dozen contractions in one set. However it may take months for you to reach this level. Do not expect immediate results.

This set of exercises should be repeated as often as possible per day but at least 6 times. For example each time you finish at the toilet, put the kettle on, answer the phone, stop at red lights whilst driving a car and when watching television.

Once you have improved the strength of your pelvic floor muscles it will be useful to contract them before each time you laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise, lift or push. This should then improve your continence.