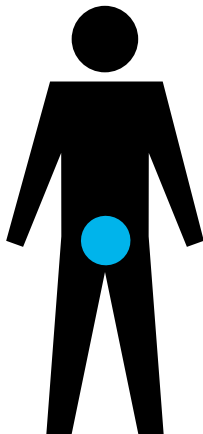


SPOTLIGHT ON

**Pelvic floor exercises
before and after
surgery to remove
the prostate (radical
prostatectomy)**

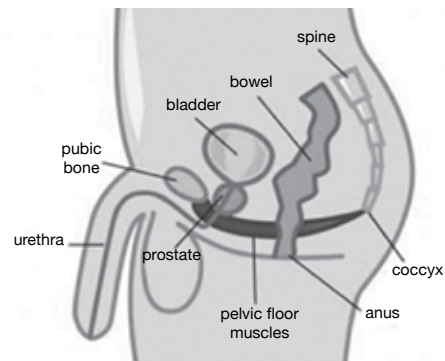


Introduction

This leaflet gives you some information about pelvic floor exercises (PFE) and may help answer some of the questions you have. You may be seen by a physiotherapist who specialises in continence and sexual function and he/she will explain PFE to you. If you are unsure about any of the information or have any questions, then please speak to your specialist physiotherapist, clinical nurse specialist (CNS), urologist, nurse on the ward looking after you or your GP.

What are the pelvic floor muscles?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscles, ligaments and special tissue called connective tissue. Together these make up the pelvic floor muscles (PFM). They are like an elastic hammock inside your body. They stretch from your pubic bone at the front of your body through to the coccyx, the small bone at the bottom of your spine and from side to side. There are two openings in the PFM to allow the urethra (waterpipe) and the back passage to pass through. Normally, the openings for the urethra and back passage through the PFM are quite tight helping with control of the urethra and back passage.



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What do they do?

They assist with core support, an essential element of pelvic stability and control. Additionally they:

- Support the bladder and the bowel.
- Work all the time to help control the urethra (waterpipe) and keep it closed to help stop you from leaking urine. PFM need to work harder when you cough, sneeze, laugh, exercise or change your position.
- Work all the time to help you control passing motions or passing wind/gas.

What are the signs that my pelvic floor may be weakened?

- Stress incontinence. When urine leaks out when you cough, sneeze, laugh, lift something, exercise, change position eg lying to sitting or sitting to standing.
- Urge incontinence. When you urgently need to pass urine, can't hold it back and may not be able to reach the toilet in time.
- Frequency. When you need to pass urine frequently during the day and night.
- Overflow incontinence. When the bladder doesn't empty completely, urine builds up and can lead to it overflowing causing frequent dribbling.
- Nocturia. When you have to get up many times during the night to pee. This is called nocturia. Typically there may be leakage at night without waking, which is known as nocturnal incontinence.
- Dribbling. After finishing peeing, you may notice a little urine leaks out.

Why might these muscles get weak?

- Surgery to your prostate such as radical prostatectomy (removing the prostate) or Trans Urethral Resection of the prostate (TURP).
- Constipation. As you may be constantly 'pushing down' and straining to empty your bowels. Over time this can stretch your pelvic floor and make it weaker.
- Being very overweight can put extra pressure on your pelvic floor muscles.
- A chronic cough such as a smoker's cough or cough with chronic bronchitis or asthma. Continually coughing can damage and overstretch the PFMs.
- Lifting. The pelvic floor muscles work in opposition to impact and load. Leakage may occur when the pelvic floor is too weak to withstand the forces during exercise. Modifying the load during exercise to allow the PFM to be strengthened is a better option than avoiding heavy lifting all together as

functional exercise - such as lifting weights - can actually help strengthen the PFM in the long run.

- PFMs become weaker with age. However, strengthening exercises can help no matter what age you are. Never too old to get stronger.
- If you don't exercise your pelvic floor muscles regularly they lose muscle tone just the same as any other muscle in your body. This may lead to them becoming stretched and weak and not working as well as before.

Why should I do pelvic floor exercises?

Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen your pelvic floor muscles to give support to your bladder and bowel again. This improved support should help you control your bladder and bowel better and improve or stop any leakage of urine. Having strong pelvic floor muscles may also help you to achieve and maintain an erection.

PFEs can help prevent and reduce urinary incontinence after a radical prostatectomy. Usually, you will be advised to do PFEs before having any operation or procedure to your prostate or pelvic surgery. This is to help make sure that the muscles holding urine in the bladder are strong and in good condition before surgery which should help with any continence difficulties after surgery. Doing PFEs may help you regain urinary control sooner and may help reduce the number of times you lose control and pass urine unintentionally.

Pelvic floor exercises (PFE)

An individualised programme of pelvic floor exercises can be provided by a physiotherapist who specialises in continence. You can ask to be referred to your local physiotherapy department for more advice or contact the POGP (Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Group) pogp.csp.org.uk/information-patients for details of specialist continence physiotherapists in your area. The CNS, nurse on the ward, urologist or GP will also be able to give you more information on PFE.

How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles

(The information that follows about pelvic floor exercises is meant as general guidance. As procedures may vary slightly from hospital to hospital, ask for more advice from staff at the hospital you are attending. If you have been given any specific guidance by the hospital then it is important that you follow their instructions.)

There are 3 steps to doing pelvic floor exercises



Step 1 Identifying your pelvic floor muscles (PFM)

Do's	Avoid
<p>Get yourself into a comfortable position either sitting or lying with your tummy muscles, thighs and buttocks relaxed.</p> <p>Keep checking with yourself that you're not starting to clench other areas in your body (like your fists, jaw, legs or buttocks).</p>	<p>You should avoid squeezing or tightening the muscles in your buttocks, thighs or tummy.</p> <p>You should avoid clenching your abdominal muscles.</p>
<p>Keep your breathing natural, just breathe normally. Keep checking with yourself that you're not starting to hold your breath.</p> <p>It might be easier to tighten PFMs when you breathe out.</p>	<p>You should avoid holding your breath.</p>
<p>Now focus on the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from peeing or trying to stop yourself from passing wind.</p>	<p>You should not tighten your pelvic muscles when peeing or trying to stop your urinary flow.</p>
<p>You can do the exercises sitting, lying or standing. It is best to exercise these muscles in a functional position - that is when you are most likely to leak urine.</p>	

Step 2 Check that you are doing the exercises properly

Start off by drawing your penis into your pelvis (or shortening your penis). At the same time that you do this you should feel your testicles lift, your scrotum and anus (back passage) tighten.

- i. You can feel if you are using the correct muscles if you put your fingertips on the skin (perineum) behind your scrotum then when you tighten the muscles you will feel the perineum lift-up from your fingertips.
- ii. You can also check this by standing in front of a mirror without clothes and tightening the muscles. You should see the base of your penis pull up towards your tummy and your scrotum lift-up. You may see your lower tummy pull in slightly.

After contracting (tightening) the PFM's it is important to fully relax the muscles in a controlled way. Let your penis lengthen, feel your testicles drop, back passage relax and imagine slowly re-starting the flow of urine.

To check you are relaxing the PFM's you can do the 2 steps above, only in reverse.

Step 3 Pelvic Floor Exercises into action

Once you have made sure that you are exercising the correct muscles there are 2 types of exercises that you need to do. However, if you are at all unsure, check with the specialist physiotherapist or CNS for more help.

Slow exercises (also known as long holds):

Steadily tighten the pelvic muscles and hold for as long as you can. Build up until you can manage to hold for a maximum of 10 seconds. Relax the muscles for a count of 4. You can repeat this tightening and relaxing up to a maximum of 10 times.

Fast exercises (also known as short holds):

Tighten the pelvic muscles as hard as possible for just a second before relaxing. You can repeat this tightening and relaxing up to a maximum of 10 times.

Gradually build up until you manage to do 10 slow exercises and 10 fast exercises between 3- 6 times a day.

Begin the pelvic floor exercises lying down if possible. As control improves, changing position from lying to sitting to standing.

The exercises can also be added to your general and/or gym exercise programme.

When should I start these exercises and how long should I continue?

There is now evidence that undertaking a programme of PFM exercises before having your operation or procedure is very beneficial and can help with issues of continence afterwards. For more information about this you can check this link <https://rdcu.be/ciuZz>

With this in mind, if you're going for an operation or procedure to your prostate, you may be advised to start these exercises as soon as possible after diagnosis.

When should I re-start my PFEs after my surgery?

Re-starting PFEs after your procedure may differ from man to man. You can ask for more advice about re-starting PFEs from one of the clinical team looking after you.

Generally speaking, you can re-start your PFEs whenever your catheter is taken out.

You should not do PFEs when you have a catheter in place as this can irritate the bladder and cause you some discomfort.

In fact a maintenance programme for life may be beneficial for some men. This can be less intensive than your original programme but still means that you do these exercises every day. If you're not sure, ask your specialist physio, CNS, urologist or GP for more information and help.

Making your pelvic floor exercises part of an active lifestyle can help maintain a strong and functional set of PFM's.

Hints to help:

- The muscles may get tired at first but will get stronger the more you practice your exercises, so try to do a little more each time.
- However, don't be tempted to try to speed up the process by doing more exercises, more often during the day. Over-exercising the muscles can lead to the muscles getting fatigued (very tired) and can slow the recovery process.
- Be patient, don't give up. It may take a couple of months before you see an improvement. Most men will find that they have fewer leaks after doing PFE for 3 months and it may take up to 6 or 12 months before there is full improvement.
- To help you remember to do your exercises, do them at the same time that you do another regular activity. For example; after you have finished passing urine, having breakfast, lunch or dinner, queuing for the bus, your commute to work, having your shower or bath or watching the news. Try to include them as part of your daily routine. It doesn't matter what you're doing or where you are - nobody else knows that you're doing these!
- To help with any embarrassing dribbles and get rid of any urine left in your urethra (waterpipe) after you pee, firmly squeeze your PFMs, this should help avoid any dribbling.
- Heavy lifting may also exacerbate problems if weight training is done improperly with breath holding increasing the abdominal pressure and therefore the pressure on the pelvic floor muscles or too early on in your recovery. If the pelvic floor muscles are too weak to oppose the impact forces, from activities like heavy lifting, then a leak may result from the inability to withstand these forces.
- Until you are able to control your bladder fully and to help with any leakage or dribbling, you can temporarily choose to wear an absorbent pad inside your underwear. These are designed to lock away urine, help prevent any smell and to keep you dry. Knowing these can prevent any embarrassing accidents may make you feel better and give you more confidence to carry on with your day-to-day activities.
- Cycling a lot can put added pressure on your perineum (area of skin between scrotum and back passage). You might like to consider getting some padded

shorts or there are special 'cut out' saddles that you can buy. See the article on our website about cycling. <https://www.prostatescotland.org.uk/help-and-support-for-you/faqs/might-cycling-affect-prostate>

If you have any questions or concerns about PFE, speak to the specialist physio, CNS, urologist, nurse on the ward or GP.

Additional help

Prostate Scotland App

'Prostate Scotland is currently developing an App, please check our website www.prostatescotland.org.uk for further details of when the App will be available.

Within the App there will be the facility to set reminders of when to do PFEs.

Squeezy app

There is an app available called Squeezy <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/squeezy-nhs-pelvic-floor-app/id700740791>. This app reminds you when you need to do PFE, and you can record the PFE you've done. It comes with a set of standard exercises but can be changed to suit you and fit into your lifestyle.

Pre-surgery clinics

Some hospitals offer special clinics to help and support you before prostate surgery often offering guidance on PFEs.

Online film of how to do PFEs

Two films by advanced practitioner physiotherapists at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh explaining more about PFEs before and after prostate surgery is available on our website at <https://www.prostatescotland.org.uk/help-and-support-for-you/pelvic-floor-exercises>

Before using any of the above please check with your specialist physiotherapist, CNS, urologist, GP, or nurse on the ward that these are suitable for you.

NOTES:

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This booklet has been compiled by Prostate Scotland with advice from PAGES (Prostate Advisory Group Prostate Scotland). Prostate Scotland acknowledges the help and support from the members of the group:

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