

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

Patient Information – Physiotherapy

The Pelvic Floor Muscles (PFMs)

- Lie at the base of the pelvis between the pubic bone at the front and tail bone at the back. The outlets from the bladder (urethra), vagina and back passage (anal canal) pass through the PFMs.
- Give support to the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus, rectum — the lower part of the bowel) to prevent or improve prolapse.
- Help to prevent leakage from the bladder (urine) and back passage (wind or faeces).
- Support your pelvis and lower back.
- Have a role in sexual satisfaction.

How to strengthen your PFM's

1. Lie on your side or sit leaning forwards. You need to feel comfortable.
2. Relax your tummy, bottom and thighs. (When you are relaxed you will see your tummy gently rise and fall as you breathe.) It is important you do this step before you tighten your PFMs.
3. Imagine squeezing around your back passage (as if stopping wind) and squeeze around your front passage as if stopping urine. Make sure you continue to breath normally.
4. Try to lift and hold for 1-5 seconds then rest for 5 seconds.

Repeat 8-10 times – 3 times per day

It has been shown that tightening your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze or lift anything heavy helps to reduce leakage of urine. This is known as 'The Knack'.

How to progress your PFM exercises

- Try to tighten your PFMs when you are sitting, eg.
 - Sitting at the table and leaning forwards keeping your back straight. Rest your elbows on the table.
 - Sitting with your back well supported on a comfortable chair.
 - Sitting on an exercise ball. (Only if you are familiar with how to sit on a ball correctly.)
- Aim to hold for longer, 5-10 seconds.
- Rest for a few seconds between each exercise. If the PFM's stop lifting properly they may be fatigued. Stop and rest.
- As your PFM's get stronger and you are able to lift and hold more easily, try and tighten your PFM's when you are standing.
- It can take 3-6 months to get the full benefit of PFME so don't give up too soon!
- Further PFM information is available at www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au

NOTE: If you are pregnant, you should receive a booklet from your LMC or from the maternity ward called 'Physiotherapy Advice after Childbirth' Ref.2407047. This contains a section specifically on PFM exercises after childbirth.

For more information about:

hospital and specialist services, go to www.cdhb.health.nz | your health and medication, go to www.healthinfo.org.nz