



Pelvic Floor

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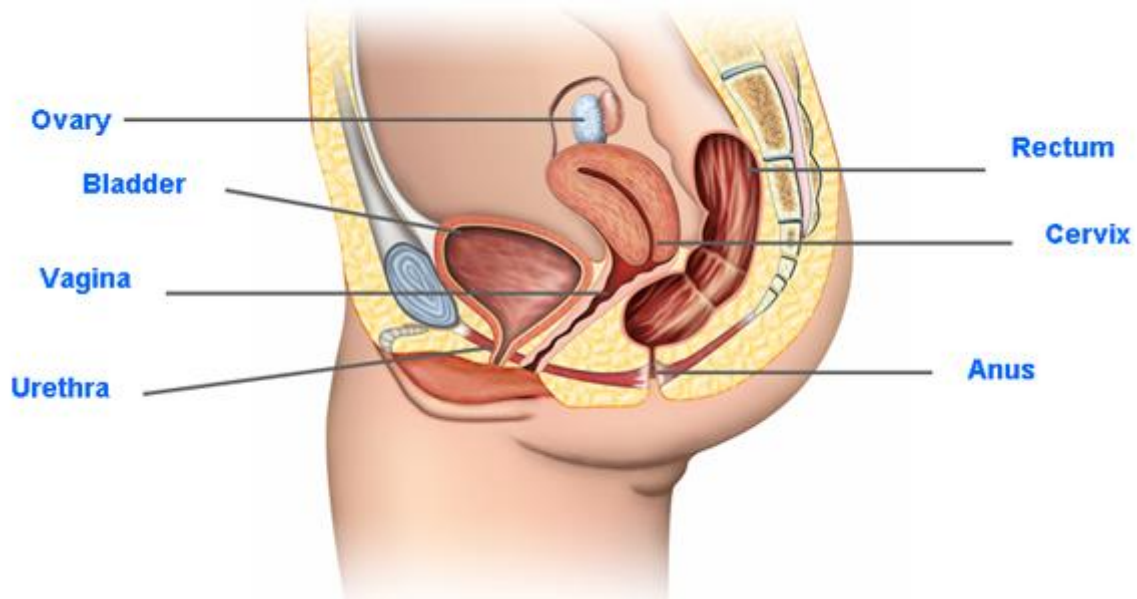
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Introduction

The pelvic floor muscles (from here onwards called pfm) play an important role in the passage of urine and faeces and sexual activities. When they contract, they close the passage of the urethra and anus. This function is especially important with physical exertion such as coughing, sneezing and exercising. As the pressure then increases in the abdominal cavity, the contents of the bladder are driven outwards through the urethra and involuntary loss of urine may occur. Involuntary loss of urine is called urinary incontinence. If this occurs due to pressure (coughing, sneezing, laughing, running) in the abdominal cavity it is referred to as stress incontinence.



Weak pelvic floor muscles

As the result of hormones during the pregnancy and pressure from the growing uterus, pelvic complaints are common. This means you urinate more often and/or feel the urge to.

After pregnancy and childbirth, the pelvic floor muscles can become weakened and damaged. This can lead to stress incontinence and a prolapsed uterus. Some women claim they experience sex differently after giving birth and about 25% of women suffer from temporary stress / incontinence.

Consult with GP or midwife

Many women feel that there is little to be done about the complaints and that these are simply part of being pregnant. However, various treatments and exercises exist to help reduce the symptoms and it is important that you discuss these symptoms with your doctor or midwife, even though you might find this embarrassing. Should the complaints persist despite treatment by a pelvic floor specialist, a visit to the gynaecologist is highly recommended.

Prevention

- There are certain things you can look out for to help avoid pelvic floor complaints or worsening of the symptoms:
- Rest
- No (heavy) lifting and take good deep breaths
- Try to keep coughing to a minimum
- Go to the toilet regularly, take your time and relax the pfm
- Exercise the pfm without exerting the belly muscles
- Avoid high-impact training as jumping or running

Exercises

Usually exercises against incontinence after childbirth are effective and symptoms disappear within two to six months. Should they not offer relief, please consult an expert.

Through exercising your pelvic floor muscles you can usually prevent complaints such as incontinence and a prolapsed uterus (prolapse). If you experience problems during or after pregnancy, exercises can help to reduce them. However do not wait with exercising until problems occur, prevention is very important!

You will find examples of exercises in this folder. These exercises can also be performed during pregnancy. Try out which ones suit you best and during which exercises your pfm contract the most. Endeavour to do some of these exercises on a daily basis and make them part of your day (e.g. when climbing stairs or during your lunch break).

Most people are not aware of their pelvic floor muscles. You can contract and relax them by 'pulling in' your vagina and anus. By following the exercises properly, you will learn the difference between contracting and relaxing your pfm.

Exercises (pfm means pelvic floor muscles)

Exercise 1

- Lie flat on your back, legs bent and slightly spread
- Tighten your pfm firmly for 1 second, repeat this 10 x
- Tighten your pfm for 6 seconds, repeat 10 x



Exercise 2

- Lie flat on your back, legs bent and slightly spread
- Tighten your pfm in 3 stages:
 1. Gently
 2. Firmly
 3. As firm as possible
- Feel an inwards motion of your pfm
- Relax your pfm in 3 stages
- Repeat 10 x



Exercise 3

- Lie flat on your back, legs bent and slightly spread
- Tighten your pfm and
 1. Breathe in; the pressure on your pfm increases
 2. Breathe out; the pressure decreases
 3. Breathe in and out
- Repeat 5 x



Exercise 4

- Lie flat on your back, legs bent and slightly spread
- Tighten your pfm while you cough slightly
- Relax your pfm
- Repeat 10 x



Exercise 5

- Lie down on your left side
- Tighten your pfm
- Raise your right leg
- Then relax your pfm
- Do this 10 x and repeat on your other side



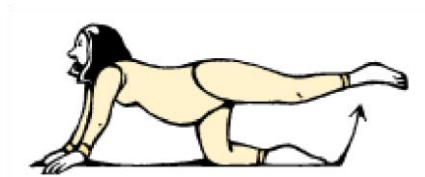
Exercise 6

- Lie on your belly
- Tighten your pfm; in this position you will feel the tightening of the muscles best around the urethra and vagina
- Bend and stretch your left and right leg in turns while your pfm remains tightened
- Repeat 10 x



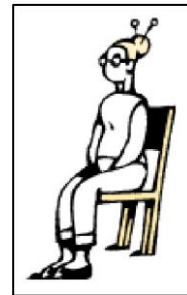
Exercise 7

- Get down on all fours
- Tighten your pfm
- Take turns in stretching your left and right leg
- Repeat 10 x



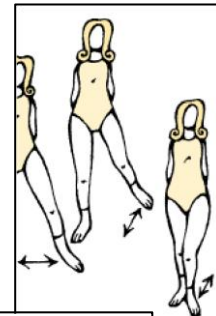
Exercise 8

- Sit on a hard set
- Tighten your pfm, the pfm 'lifts up' so to speak
- Stand up straight
- Sit back down and then relax your pfm
- Repeat 5 x



Exercise 9

- Stand up straight, legs slightly apart
- Tighten your pfm
- Move one leg: 5 x forwards, 5 x backwards, 5 x sideways
- Repeat with your other leg



Exercise 10

- Stand up straight
- Tighten your pfm and climb the steps
- Then relax your pfm
- Repeat when ascending the steps

