

Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men

Introduction

Many men experience a variety of problems with their urinary system, which can lead to unwanted leakage of urine. Some also have difficulty controlling wind or leakage from the bowels. This can be due to a weakness of the muscles of the pelvic floor, which have an important function in preventing these troublesome conditions.

What is the Pelvic Floor?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle and other tissues. These layers stretch from the tail bone at the back to the pubic bone in front. A man's pelvic floor supports the bladder and the bowel. The urethra (bladder outlet) and the rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control. The pelvic floor is also thought to play a role in maintaining an erection.

Why the Pelvic Floor Muscles get weak

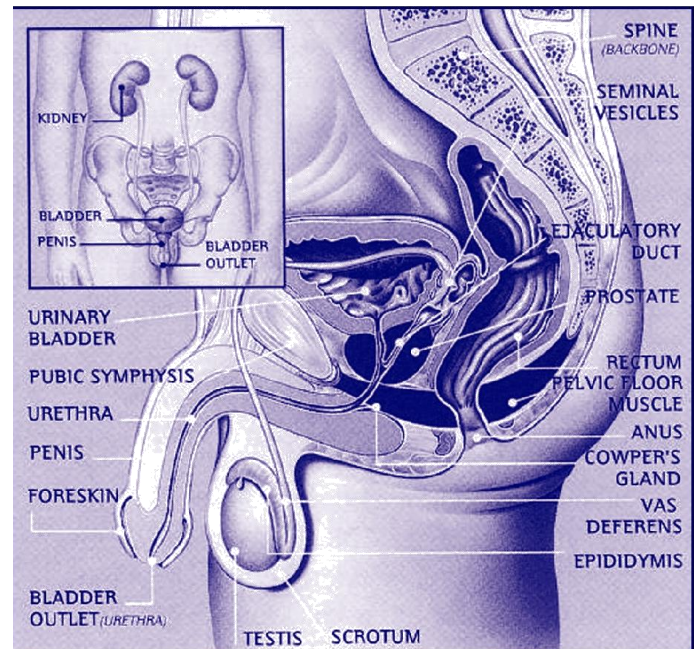
The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by:

- Surgery for an enlarged prostate gland
- Continual straining to empty the bowels, usually due to constipation
- Persistent heavy lifting
- A chronic cough, such as smoker's cough or chronic bronchitis and asthma
- Being overweight
- Lack of general fitness

Neurological damage (e.g. after a stroke or spinal injury, or resulting from other neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis) can also produce poor pelvic floor muscle function. People in this group should seek advice from a healthcare professional.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

You can improve control of your bladder and bowel by doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.



These exercises may also be useful in conjunction with a bladder training programme aimed at improving bladder control in people who experience the urgent need to pass urine frequently and who may not always "make it in time". Bladder training is explained in B&BF's booklet 'A Healthy Bladder'.

How to contract the Pelvic Floor Muscles

The first thing to do is to correctly identify the muscles that need to be exercised.

1. Sit comfortably or lay on your bed with the muscles of your thighs, buttocks and abdomen relaxed.
2. Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind. You should be able to feel the muscle move. Try not to squeeze your buttocks or tighten your thighs or tummy muscles.
3. Now imagine you are passing urine, trying to stop the flow mid-stream, then restarting it. Do not try to stop

the stream when you are actually passing water as this may, if repeated, cause problems with correct emptying. If your technique is correct, each time that you tighten your pelvic floor muscles you may feel a dip at the base of your penis, and your scrotum move up slightly.

If you are unable to feel a definite squeeze and lift action of your pelvic floor muscles, you should seek professional help to get your pelvic floor muscles working correctly - see the final section of this factsheet. Even men with very weak pelvic floor muscles can be taught these exercises by a physiotherapist or continence advisor with expertise in this area.

Doing Pelvic Floor Exercises

Now you can find your pelvic floor muscles, here are the exercises to do:

1. Your pelvic floor muscles need to have stamina. So sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart. Slowly tighten and pull up the pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can. Try lifting and squeezing them as long as you can. Rest for 4 seconds and then repeat the contraction. Build up your strength until you can do 10 slow contractions at a time, holding them for 10 seconds each with rests of 4 seconds in between.
2. Your pelvic floor muscles also need to react quickly to sudden stresses from coughing, laughing or exercise that puts pressure on the bladder. So practise some quick contractions, drawing in the pelvic floor and holding it for just one second before relaxing. Try to achieve a strong muscle tightening with up to ten quick contractions in succession.

Aim to do a set of slow contractions (exercise 1) followed by a set of quick contractions (exercise 2) 3-4 times each day.

It takes time for exercise to make muscles stronger. You are unlikely to notice any improvement for several weeks - so stick at it! You will need to exercise regularly for at least 3 months before the muscles gain their full strength.

Make the exercises a daily routine

Once you have learnt how to do these exercises, they should be done regularly, giving each set your full attention. It might be helpful to have at least five regular times during the day for doing the exercises - for example, after going to the toilet, when having a drink,

when lying in bed. You need to tighten your pelvic floor muscles also while you are getting up from a chair, coughing or lifting. Some men find that tightening before they do such things, helps them to regain control.

Good results take time. In order to build up your pelvic floor muscles to their maximum strength you will need to work hard at these exercises. You may not notice an improvement for several weeks and you will not reach your maximum performance for a few months.

When you have recovered control of your bladder or bowel you should continue doing the exercises twice a day for life.

Other tips to help your Pelvic Floor

- Share the lifting of heavy loads.
- Avoid constipation and prevent any straining during a bowel movement.
- Seek medical advice for hay-fever, asthma and bronchitis to reduce sneezing and coughing.
- Keep your weight within the right range for your height and age.

Seeking Help

To achieve your best results you may need to seek help from a specialist physiotherapist or continence advisor. They will have a range of treatments available that can help you learn how to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.

You can get the details of your nearest Continence Clinic by phoning B&BF or visiting our website.

Prostate Problems

B&BF also has a fact sheet on 'Your Prostate and You' which gives information and advice on prostate concerns.

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