

# PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES FOR PREGNANT WOMEN



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Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust



This leaflet explains what pelvic floor exercises are and why they are important in the antenatal period.

## WHAT IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor is made up of muscles and ligaments that lie across the base of your pelvis. They extend from the backbone (coccyx) to the pubic bone and from side to side.

The sheet of muscle acts to hold up the bladder, womb and bowel. In addition they stay slightly tense in order to stop leakage of urine, wind or faeces from their openings. Strong pelvic floor muscles also play a role in heightening sexual pleasure.

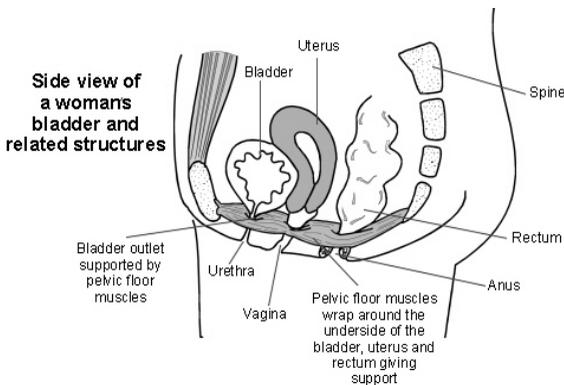


Image courtesy of [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISING THE PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by vaginal birth especially if you require assisted vaginal delivery or episiotomy or suffer from a significant vaginal tear. In addition abdominal surgery, menopause, obesity and increased strain such as seen in heavy lifting or chronic constipation also weaken the muscles.

Pelvic floor exercises strengthen the muscles and increase their tone. Carrying these out during pregnancy is shown to reduce your risk of incontinence after giving birth.

If you are unable to pass urine or control your bowels as you were before delivery it is very important that you contact your doctor, midwife or physiotherapist to discuss this.

## HOW DO I DO PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES?

Finding your pelvic floor muscles: Choose a comfortable

position, imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and urine at the same time. Squeeze and pull the muscles into your body. Make sure not to clench your buttocks.

Please note that you should not start-stop your urine flow as this may affect correct bladder emptying.

Exercise 1 targets the fast muscles fibres which need to react quickly to sudden stresses. Undertake 10 sharp strong contractions of the pelvic floor muscles lasting for just one second with a five second break between each one.

Exercise 2 targets the slow muscle fibres which work against gravity and support the organs. Slowly tighten the muscles and hold the contraction for up to 10 seconds (you may only manage 2-5 seconds to begin with). Relax and rest for five seconds before repeating. Perform this

5 -10 times with the aim to hold the contraction for 5 -10 seconds.

Aim to do 40 repetitions a day. It can take up to three months before a difference is noted. It is important these exercises are done daily. Aim to do during your normal day to day activities.

These exercises should be resumed as soon as possible after delivery.

### **WANT MORE INFORMATION?**

You can discuss pelvic floor exercises with your midwife or doctor at any time during your antenatal care.

Visit

[www.bladderandbowel.org](http://www.bladderandbowel.org) for more helpful information and resources.

### **ALTERNATIVELY CONTACT US**

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**If you would like this information in an alternative format, or if you need help with communicating with us, please let us know. You can call us on 01708 435454 / 020 8970 8234 or email [pals@bhrhospitals.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@bhrhospitals.nhs.uk) . If you are deaf or unable to communicate with us using telephone or email, we have a text service which can be contacted on 07800 005 502.**

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