

# Urinary incontinence in pregnancy

**This leaflet explains why you might be experiencing urinary incontinence (leaking wee) while pregnant, and outlines exercises you can do to manage your symptoms and to reduce the problem.**

**Please ring 0118 322 7811 or 7812 to speak to a pelvic health / maternity physiotherapist at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.**

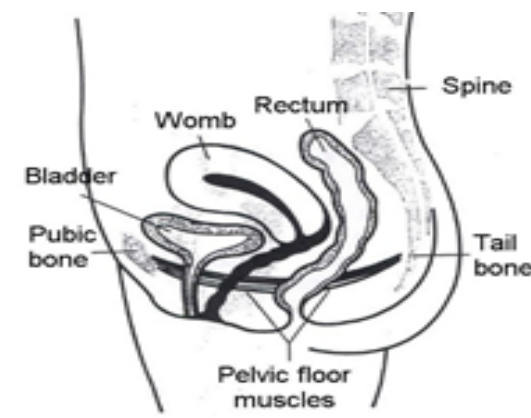
## Pelvic floor muscles

These are the sling of muscles that lie underneath the bladder and bowels which, when contracted (squeezed), tighten around the back, vaginal and urethral passages. They support the internal organs and help control the bladder and bowels.

During pregnancy, your body produces a hormone called “relaxin”. This hormone softens all the muscles and ligaments, to allow your baby room to grow within the uterus (womb), and to prepare your body to give birth. Because of this, the pelvic floor muscles also

become softened and weaker. This means that they are less able to prevent wee from leaking out, especially when you do things like coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting or bending.

As your baby grows and gets heavier, the pressure on the pelvic floor muscles increases, so you may find that your incontinence gets worse as your pregnancy progresses.



## What can I do to help myself?

Exercising and strengthening the pelvic floor muscles is the best way to try to improve the situation. You should also make sure that you go to the toilet regularly (but not too frequently). Try going about every two to two and a half hours (this advice is for while you're pregnant)

***Make sure you do your pelvic floor exercises 3 times per day minimum.*** The research shows us that this is the minimum you should do for the exercise to be effective.

## How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises:

### Exercise 1 'slow ones'

- You can do these exercises when sitting or lying, but sitting will be harder at first as you are working against gravity. If you are heavily pregnant, try lying on your side to do it.
- Tighten the back passage as if trying to hold in wind and squeeze your vaginal muscles as if trying to hold in a tampon.
- Do not use your tummy, legs or bottom cheek muscles when doing this exercise. You should not see any external movement.

- Aim to hold this squeeze for 3-5 seconds. Keep breathing throughout and then relax your pelvic floor for at least 5 seconds in between each contraction.
- You should repeat this squeeze **10 times**.
- Build up strength within your pelvic floor until you can squeeze and hold for 10 seconds.

### Exercise 2 'quick ones'

- Stay in the same position as you were when doing the slow exercises.
- Tighten and squeeze the muscles as above.
- Hold for 1 second and relax for 3 seconds. Repeat **10 times**.

Try to build these exercises into your routine, for example, while making a cup of tea or at set times during the day. Use this squeeze to help prevent or reduce leakage by squeezing the muscles before you cough, sneeze, lift, or stand from sitting. You will need to do these exercises every day for the rest of your life, to keep your pelvic floor muscles strong and prevent further problems.

Once you have had your baby, if the problem persists you can ask for a referral to pelvic health physiotherapy, where we can assess your pelvic floor muscles and give you a more tailored exercise program to help you.

### Further information and useful websites

1. Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy (POGP)  
[https://thepogp.co.uk/patient\\_information/pregnancy\\_and\\_early\\_postnatal.aspx](https://thepogp.co.uk/patient_information/pregnancy_and_early_postnatal.aspx)
2. Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP)  
<https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/incontinence/pregnancy-related-incontinence>

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Pelvic Health & Maternity Physiotherapy, March 2023

Review due: March 2025

## Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

*'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'*

You can read our maternity strategy here



Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent