NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Relaxing your pelvic floor muscles

This leaflet gives advice and exercises to help you relax your pelvic floor muscles.

Why do I need to relax my pelvic floor muscles?

It is very important to be able to fully relax your pelvic floor muscles as well as being able to contract (squeeze) them.

If the muscles are already stiff and tense, it is very difficult to contract them effectively and build strength, so your pelvic floor exercises will not make as much difference.

You may feel as though you are not tightening your muscles enough if you have a tight pelvic floor.

Full relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles is also essential to allow the passing of urine and faeces (poo).

What problems can having a tight pelvic floor cause?

- Constipation and pain when passing stools or having a feeling of incomplete emptying of bowels.
- Bladder pain.
- Urinary urgency and incontinence.
- Incomplete bladder emptying.
- Pain or discomfort during sexual intercourse.
- Stress incontinence – sometimes your pelvic floor can be tight on one side only, and this can cause opening of the sphincter muscles which can exacerbate make leaking worse when coughing, sneezing, running, laughing for example.

How do I relax my pelvic floor muscles?

Lie down with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed (crook lying).

©Physiotools

Listen to your breathing. You may notice your stomach rising as you breathe in. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

Then follow these three steps:

a) Breathe into your stomach so that it rises up. You can place your hands on your stomach to feel the stomach rising. Hold your breath for 4-5 seconds, making sure to keep your shoulders relaxed and your ribcage soft.

b) While you are holding your breath, consciously relax your tummy downwards and relax your pelvic floor muscles down towards your feet. You could also use the image of your pelvis getting wider, or a rosebud opening, until you feel them soften.

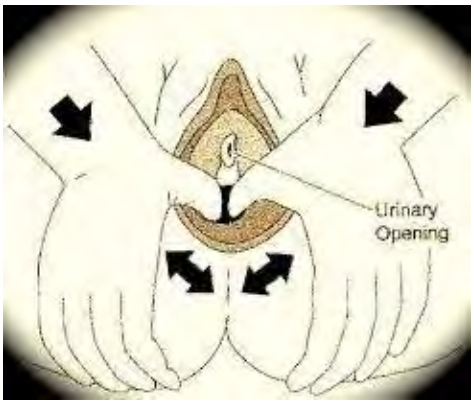
Remember that this is **NOT** an active push; you are trying to “let go” of all the muscles instead.

c) Then ‘sigh’ the breath out, with an open mouth as if steaming up a window. This should be completely passive in nature.

The above technique does require lots of practice and concentration to begin with. Once you are able to do this consistently, incorporate it into your pelvic floor muscle training by relaxing your pelvic floor muscles on the in-breath, and contracting them on the out- breath. If you are doing slow contractions, remember to take normal breaths in between each contraction. Alternatively, you can complete this exercise sitting in a comfortable and supported position.

Other helpful tips:

1. **Perineal massage** can be helpful in stretching out any scar tissue if you had any previous surgeries or had stitches during childbirth. You can do perineal massage yourself or show your partner these instructions.



Instructions for perineal massage:

- Wash your hands and keep fingernails short.
- Relax in a private place and sit with your knees bent in an upright position, leaning on some pillows for back support if preferred. It can be helpful to start following a shower or bath.
- Use a lubricant such a vitamin E (avoid nut based oils if you have a known allergy)
- Place lubricated thumbs or thumb 1 to 1.5 inches inside your vagina.
- Press down towards the anus and to the side, hold for about 1-2 minutes until you feel a slight stretching. With your thumbs, slowly massage the lower half of the vagina using a ‘u’ shaped movement, while focusing on relaxing.
- You will notice the area becoming more stretchy as you get used to practising the technique.
- There are no known risks for massaging your perineum, but you should not perform perineal massage if you have vaginal thrush (candida), genital herpes or any other vaginal infection. If you suspect you have any of these conditions then please speak to your GP.

2. **Internal trigger point massage** of the pelvic floor can sometimes be helpful for tight pelvic floor muscles.

Instructions for internal trigger point massage:

- In a comfortable position, as above, insert a finger into the vagina and feel for any tender points in the muscles. If you get any pain or pressure around your bladder or back passage area, press and hold on that point until the pressure decreases. Then move on to different points, if any. If you do not feel pressure or pain in the other areas, you do not need to do this.
- Alternatively, you could use a pelvic wand such as the Therawand which is designed for this purpose, or a vaginal dilator, which can reach further into all the pelvic floor muscles with ease.

3. **Hip or low back stretches:** If you have hip or low back pain, some general stretches of the muscles in these areas might be helpful. Ask your physiotherapist for advice.

Contact us

Pelvic Health and Maternity physiotherapy
RBFT Physiotherapy Department
0118 322 7811 or **7812**

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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

J Churches, RBFT Specialist Physiotherapist, Pelvic Health and Maternity, 2021
Reviewed: July 2024
Next review due: July 2026