

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve the function of pelvic floor muscles.

This pelvic floor physiotherapist article teaches you:

1. Pelvic floor exercise guidelines for improving strength and endurance
2. Pelvic floor exercises for quick control (for cough and sneeze)
3. How long until you notice improvements
4. How to progress pelvic floor exercises

Correct pelvic floor exercise technique

To train pelvic floor muscles you need to practice lifting and squeezing your pelvic floor openings because this is what these muscles do –lift and squeeze your pelvic floor openings. It is vital to know correct technique for pelvic floor muscle exercises before commencing your exercises.

The correct technique for pelvic floor exercises involves simultaneously lifting and squeezing all three pelvic openings; the anus, vagina and urethra (urine tube)

When are pelvic floor exercises important for a woman?

Pelvic exercises should be performed regularly throughout life. There are times and events in a woman's life when they become even more important for pelvic health:

- During pregnancy and after childbirth
- Preparation for incontinence, hysterectomy or pelvic organ prolapse surgery
- After incontinence, hysterectomy or prolapse surgery
- With menopause and beyond.

1. How to improve pelvic floor strength, endurance and support

Pelvic floor exercises can improve:

- Pelvic floor strength, thickness and firmness for better pelvic floor support - for prolapse and continence management
- Pelvic floor endurance or ability to contract for longer periods of time or increased number of consecutive contractions -for prolapse, bladder and bowel management.

Training tips and guidelines

1. Make each pelvic floor muscle contraction as strong as possible
2. Maintain every contraction for 3-10 seconds
3. Repeat 8-12 strong contractions in a row to fatigue (this is one full set of exercise)
4. Rest your pelvic floor muscles until recovered 1-2 minutes between each effort
5. Perform 1-3 sets of pelvic floor exercise every day
6. Adhere to the correct pelvic floor exercise technique
7. Perform full pelvic floor muscle action lifting your pelvic floor as high as you are able to with each attempt
8. Perform pelvic floor exercises in a controlled manner for the lift and the lower down.



How to progress pelvic floor strength and endurance exercises

- Increase the duration or length of each pelvic floor muscle contraction
- Increase the strength and effort you use with each pelvic floor muscle contraction
- Decrease the rest time between consecutive pelvic floor exercises when possible
- Use vaginal weights to progressively increase resistance to the pelvic floor muscles
- Progress the positions to increase the challenge of lifting the pelvic floor muscles against gravity from lying down to sitting and standing positions.

How long until I see results?

There are initial rapid gains with pelvic floor exercises even over the first month of training; however the ACSM recommends strength training periods of 15-20 weeks as a minimum. This is because effective pelvic floor training requires increasing overload to promote muscle changes, meaning that women need to work harder over time to continuously improve. Studies show that for weak pelvic floor muscles, pelvic floor muscle strength increases over 6 months of training (Bo et al 1990).

2. Pelvic floor muscle power exercises

Pelvic floor muscle power is a combination of pelvic floor muscle speed and strength. This training helps you use your muscles effectively for when you cough and sneeze

Pelvic floor muscle power involves strength and speed so that pelvic floor muscles can contract quickly when needed such as before and during a cough or sneeze.

How to improve pelvic floor muscle power

1. Contract your pelvic floor muscles quickly and strongly using the correct pelvic floor exercise technique for 2 seconds and relax over two seconds.
2. Rest briefly and repeat these strong moderate speed pelvic floor contractions for 8-10 times in a row.
3. Lift your pelvic floor as high as you can with each successive attempt
4. Perform pelvic floor exercises in a controlled manner for the lift and the relax
5. When you feel confident and can contract 10 times in a row you are ready to progress your power exercises.

How to progress pelvic floor power exercises

- Contract your pelvic floor muscles as strongly as possible, hold the contraction and add 3-4 fast contractions on top of the strong hold
- Rest and repeat for up to 5 times in a row
- Lift your pelvic floor as high as you can with each attempt and then relax your muscles and rest briefly between each attempt

Ensure that you fully relax your pelvic floor muscles back to their original resting position when you have completed your pelvic exercises.

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