

## Bladder Exercises

Bladder exercises are also known as pelvic floor exercises. They are performed using muscles inside the pelvis known as pelvic floor muscles. These muscles are located in and around the area where you sit. Pelvic floor exercises for incontinence can effectively reduce and overcome bladder leakage.

**Read on now for the following physiotherapist information and exercise guidelines:**

- What is incontinence?
- Causes of incontinence
- Are bladder control exercises effective?
- How do bladder control exercises work?
- Physiotherapist guidelines for bladder control exercises
- How to get immediate bladder control

### What is incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is a common condition with 1 in 3 women experiencing this problem. Urinary incontinence is defined as the involuntary loss of urine (bladder leakage). Some women leak urine occasionally with a cough or sneeze, while other women experience bladder leakage every day.

Bladder control exercises are most commonly prescribed for two types of incontinence:

#### 1. Stress urinary incontinence

The most common type of incontinence in women is called stress urinary incontinence. Stress incontinence is bladder leakage with exertion or increased pressure on the bladder for example with a cough or sneeze. Stress incontinence is most prevalent on its own in younger women and women going through menopause (peri menopausal).

#### 2. Urge urinary incontinence

Urge urinary incontinence is the leakage of urine associated with a strong urge to empty the bladder and the inability to reach the toilet to prevent leakage. Mature women are most likely to experience a mixed pattern of stress incontinence and urge urinary incontinence.

### Are bladder control exercises effective?

Yes, the highest quality scientific studies have shown that exercises for incontinence (pelvic floor exercises) can reduce and/or cure stress incontinence in women. Pelvic floor exercise is now recommended as the first line of intervention for treating stress incontinence before surgery is considered.

Treatment of urge incontinence treatment with bladder control exercise has not yet been proven effective in the research. Women can often train their pelvic floor muscles to overcome the strong urge to empty the bladder. Bladder control exercises are frequently prescribed to treat urge incontinence in clinical physiotherapy.



## How do bladder control exercises work?

Bladder control pelvic floor exercises work in two ways:

1. Pelvic exercises improved the support and stiffness of the pelvic floor muscles. This increases the height of the bladder and the closing pressure of the urine tube (urethra).
2. 'The Knack' is a special bladder control exercise technique that lifts the pelvic floor supports and helps to effectively prevent or reduce bladder leakage with increased pressure e.g. sneeze or cough. This technique is outlined further in this article.

## Physiotherapist guidelines for bladder control exercises

### 1. Techniques for locating your pelvic floor muscles

Finding and feeling your pelvic floor muscles working is a vital step for effective bladder control;

- Try to stop or slow the flow of urine. Practice this technique a maximum of once a week to avoid interrupting the normal flow of urine.
- Lift and squeeze the ring of muscles in and around your anus as if trying to avoid passing wind.
- Lie on your side with your knees slightly bent. Place your index finger against your perineum (the area between your anus and vagina). You should feel this area lift inwards away from your finger with correct technique.

### 2. Practice your pelvic exercises daily

***Correct bladder control exercise technique feels like a squeeze and inward lift of your pelvic openings; vagina, anus and urethra (urine tube).***

- Contract your pelvic floor muscles for up to 8 seconds at a time
- Relax your pelvic floor muscles having once contracted them and allow them to rest and recover briefly
- Repeat this set of pelvic exercises up to 8-12 times in a row for one set of exercise
- Practice a total 3 sets of exercises throughout the day
- Commence with the number of pelvic exercises and the hold duration that you can correctly perform and gradually build up over time.

### 3. Progress your strength and bladder control exercises

- Aim to perform increasingly stronger exercises over time
- Challenge yourself to exercise in upright positions. Some women commence their exercises lying down. Pelvic exercises need to be progressed to sitting and standing for increased strength and control.
- Strengthening may take 5-6 months for women with weak pelvic floor muscles. Allow your pelvic floor time to fully strengthen by committing to regular ongoing pelvic floor exercises.



## How to get immediate bladder control

### 1. Use 'The Knack'

The Knack is a highly effective technique for reducing or eliminating unwanted bladder leakage. 'The Knack' is a strong inwards lift and squeeze of the pelvic floor muscles before and during any increase in pressure. For example lift and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles before and during every cough, sneeze and/or lift. Always use 'The Knack' before any increase in pelvic pressure to control your bladder.

### 2. Use a continence device

Contiform is a discreet reusable continence device that sits comfortably within the vagina and supports the bladder and urethra. Contiform has been shown to effectively reduce and/or cure bladder control problems in some women with stress urinary incontinence. This device can be used as required and is often helpful in assisting women who are just commencing exercises for incontinence. It can also be used by women seeking to avoid bladder repair surgery.

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