

# **Pelvic Health Physiotherapy & Stress Urinary Incontinence**

## **Pelvic Health Physiotherapy**

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**Patient Information**



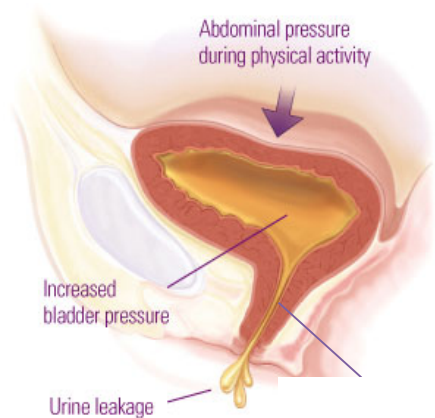
# Stress Urinary Incontinence

This is when urine leaks out at times when your bladder is under pressure, for example with coughing, sneezing or exercising. This is often due to a lack of support from the muscles and tissues around the urethra (the tube that you pass urine from) when there is increased pressure in the abdomen.

This lack of support is often due to a weakness of the pelvic floor muscles. This weakness may develop over time or more suddenly such as after childbirth. The risk factors for stress incontinence include obesity, smoking, pregnancy and giving birth.

## What can you do to help?

1. You should perform regular pelvic floor muscle exercises (see below).
2. You should try to tighten the pelvic floor muscles at the same time as you cough / sneeze / jump / shout as this can instantly reduce leakage.
3. If you are overweight then losing 5-10% of your body weight can help to reduce your symptoms.

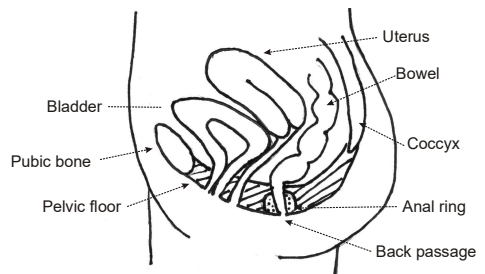


4. You should make sure any chronic coughs or allergies are well managed. You should discuss this with your GP.
5. Giving up smoking can help to improve symptoms of stress urinary incontinence.
6. If you leak urine whilst exercising you should consider switching to a different form of exercise (such as low impact exercise) until your symptoms improve. Alternatively, a vaginal support device may be of use to prevent the leakage to enable you to exercise, you should discuss this with your pelvic health physiotherapist.

Exercises that place less stress on your bladder are often referred to as 'low impact' exercise, these are exercises that do not involve activities such as running, jumping or weightlifting (e.g. swimming, cycling, Pilates). Your pelvic health physiotherapist can give you more advice on this.

## What are Pelvic Floor Muscles?

The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscle that stretch from the coccyx (tailbone) to the pubic bone (see diagram).



Good pelvic floor muscles help support the bladder, womb and bowel. They help to close the urethra (bladder outlet) and anus (back passage) to prevent leakage or loss of control.

When you pass water or have a bowel motion the pelvic floor muscles relax. Afterwards, they tighten again to restore control. The muscles also actively squeeze when you laugh, cough, lift or sneeze to help prevent any leakage.

## **How can exercise help my Pelvic Floor Muscles?**

Exercising the pelvic floor muscles can strengthen them so they give the correct support. This will improve your bladder control and improve or stop leakage of urine.

Like any other muscles in the body, the more you use and exercise them, the stronger the pelvic floor muscles will be.

## **The Exercises**

Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and then pull forward as though you are also trying to stop your flow of urine. This closes and draws up the back passage and vagina.

**You need to exercise the muscle in 2 ways**

### **1. Slow holds - for stamina**

Hold the muscle in for as long as you can up to 10 seconds. Release fully and rest for at least 5 seconds between each one. Aim to do 10 in a row.

### **2. Fast squeezes - to react quickly**

Squeeze the same muscles but strong and fast, release straight away. Aim to do 10 in a row.

**You should aim to do both of these exercises 3 to 6 times a day.**

You can do these exercises almost anywhere, anytime but not when passing urine. In the beginning you will find these exercises easier to do when lying down or sitting.

Try not to squeeze your legs together, tighten your buttocks or hold your breath whilst doing these exercises.

## **The knack**

The knack is a term used to describe learning to actively tighten your pelvic floor muscles at the same time as you complete an activity which you are aware provokes your bladder leakage. We recommend you try to contract your pelvic floor muscles at the same time as you cough, sneeze, shout, laugh or jump. This encourages your pelvic floor muscles to work effectively at the right time. Many people find just by doing this they can reduce their stress urinary incontinence.

## **How long will it take to notice a change?**

It takes time for exercise to make muscles stronger. You are unlikely to notice any improvement for several weeks - so be sure to stick at it. You will need to exercise regularly for up to 6 months before the muscles gain their full strength.

Once you have got your pelvic floor muscles strong do not forget them. You should continue to do your pelvic floor exercises a few times a week to ensure you keep their full strength and reduce the chance of the problem coming back.

## **What if I can't do these exercises?**

If you have problems doing the exercises or if you do not understand how to do them then your pelvic health physiotherapist can help you.

A pelvic health physiotherapist can assess you to see if you are exercising the pelvic floor muscles correctly and at the right level for your problem. For best results a tailored programme of exercises will usually be prescribed for you. This may include changing the position you do the exercises in, how long you hold for, how many repetitions you complete and the technique you use.

If after this if you still find it difficult to work these muscles correctly the physiotherapist can use a variety of different methods to help you improve; these will be discussed with you to help choose the best option.

## **Other treatments for Stress Urinary Incontinence**

If physiotherapy does not resolve your problem you may wish to consider surgery or, if this is not suitable you could try medication. You will be referred to the urogynaecology team to discuss these options in more detail.

### **1. Surgery**

If the advice given earlier in this booklet is not appropriate for you or you have seen no improvement with this then you may be offered surgery. Surgery is not suitable for everyone and so this needs to be discussed with your urogynaecologist on an individual level.

Surgical procedures for stress incontinence aim to improve support for the muscles around the bladder entrance, in order to help the urethra (bladder outlet) to stay closed when it should and prevent leaking. This aims to give more support but it cannot always cure the problem completely and the effects can reduce over time.

Surgery is not suitable for everyone with stress urinary incontinence. If surgery is suitable there are a number of different options, which one that is best suited will depend on your circumstances. The risk and benefits of surgery vary depending on the procedure chosen.



## **2. Medication**

Medication is sometimes used to reduce the symptoms of stress urinary incontinence. However it should not be routinely used. Medication helps to increase the muscle tone of the urethra, which should help to reduce leakage. If you begin these medications you should be reviewed by your GP at 4 weeks to check its effect.

## Contact information

If you need any further support or advice you can contact the Pelvic Health Physiotherapy team below;

Tel: 01932 722547

Email: [asp-tr.stpetersphysioappointments@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.stpetersphysioappointments@nhs.net)

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## Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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