

Exercise and pregnancy: Pelvic floor

Pelvic floor muscles and pregnancy

Strong pelvic floor muscles are invaluable during labour to help you ease the baby out and recover faster after the birth. They also help you control accidental leakage in later pregnancy when the baby is pressing on your bladder.

Where are the pelvic floor muscles?

Your pelvic floor muscles support all the organs of the pelvis – your bowels, uterus and bladder. They act as a support for these organs when you jump, sneeze, cough and lift heavy things or push in the second stage of labour.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy loosen these muscles and the growing baby presses on your bladder. You might leak a bit of wee when you cough or laugh, or during exercise.

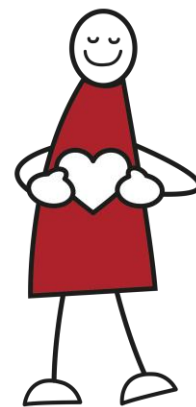
Find the correct muscles next time you go to the toilet. As you wee, imagine trying to stop the flow of the urine – the muscles you use to do this are the pelvic floor muscles. (Don't do this regularly during urination as this may lead to a urine infection.)

How to exercise your pelvic floor

Start strengthening your pelvic floor now. These exercises can be done anytime, anywhere and no one can tell that you are doing them.

For both of these exercises, you can tighten and lift your pelvic floor by imagining that you need to urinate but have to hold it in. This is done by:

- Squeezing your back passage as if stopping a bowel movement
- Squeezing your urethra as if stopping urine
- Drawing in the muscles of your vagina as if you were gripping a tampon.



Your biggest supporter

Slow twitch pelvic floor exercise

The slow twitch fibres support the pelvic organs and the baby inside you.

- 1.** Slowly tighten and lift the pelvic floor up, lifting the muscles inwards and upwards.
- 2.** Continue lifting up through the pelvis and into the tummy.
- 3.** Try to hold it for four seconds and then release slowly.
- 4.** If the contraction fails after a few seconds and there is nothing left to release, hold at the top for less time until you've worked up to four seconds.
- 5.** Gradually increase the length of hold. Ensuring you always have something to release and are able to lower slowly.

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