Pelvic floor muscle exercises (2)

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) explains about your pelvic floor muscles and some exercises you can do to make them stronger.

Your pelvic floor muscles are vital for making your bladder work well. The diagram below shows where your pelvic floor muscles are located. They are at the base of your pelvis, below the bladder, and are shaped like a ‘sling’. Both boys and girls have pelvic floor muscles. If your muscles are weak, you may leak urine in between wees. If they are too tight, you might find it difficult to wee so you don’t empty your bladder completely when you go.

Diagram: Pelvic Floor Muscles

- Uterus
- Spine
- Bowel
- Coccyx
- Bladder
- Pubic Bone
- Pelvic Floor Muscles
- Urethra
- Anus
- Prostate
- Pelvic Floor Muscles
- Urethra
- Anus
You should already have mastered the exercises in the first information sheet – this one contains more advanced exercises.

**Squeezing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles**

Once you have worked out where your pelvic floor muscles are located and learnt how to squeeze and relax while sitting down, you can move to doing the same while standing up.

1. Stand in a natural position with your feet slightly apart
2. Breathe slowly
3. Squeeze only your pelvic floor muscles and hold for five seconds
4. Gently relax your muscles for 10 seconds

Repeat this exercise three to five times initially.

**Separating your breathing from your pelvic floor muscles**

The diaphragm is a curved muscle that separates the contents of the chest from the abdomen (tummy). It often squeezes and relaxes at the same time as your pelvic floor muscles. This can increase the chance of a leak when coughing, sneezing or exercising. The following exercises will help you to separate your breathing from your pelvic floor muscles.

**Breathing out**

1. Sit in a comfortable chair and focus on your breathing
2. When you breathe in, your stomach should rise slightly and fall again when you breathe out
3. Once you are used to your breathing, move on to your pelvic floor muscles
   - Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles upwards and inwards when you breathe out for five seconds
   - Tightening the muscles around your anus and urethra (and vagina if you’re a girl)
   - Relax the muscles for another five seconds while you breathe in

Repeat this exercise two to three times a day.

**Breathing in**

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   - Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles upwards and inwards when you breathe in for five seconds
   - Tightening the muscles around your anus and urethra (and vagina if you’re a girl)
   - Relax the muscles for another five seconds while you breathe out

Repeat this exercise two to three times a day.
**Getting more control of your pelvic floor muscles**

Once you have practised squeezing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles, you can learn to control the amount of squeezing and relaxing, which strengthens them further.

1. Imagine that your pelvic floor muscles are in charge of a lift that stops at several floors
2. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles upwards and inwards, imagining the lift stops that the first floor before moving on to the second floor and so on to the fourth floor
3. Try to make the lift move as gently and smoothly as possible with no jerky moves
4. Once the lift is on the top floor, gradually squeeze and relax to let it down again floor by floor
5. If you find this exercise hard, start by squeezing your muscles to get the lift to the first floor and back down to the ground floor again

Repeat this exercise up to three times in a session – your muscles will tire quickly which is expected.

**Tightening your muscles while coughing and sneezing**

Learning to control your tummy muscles at the same time as your pelvic floor muscles can help prevent leaks when you cough and sneeze. These two exercises help you to control both sets of muscles.

**Lower tummy muscles with pelvic floor muscles**

1. Sit comfortably in a chair
2. Breathe out for five seconds while you tighten the abdominal muscles below your tummy button
3. Breathe in and relax these muscles, again for five seconds
4. Breathe out for five seconds while squeezing these abdominal muscles at the same time as squeezing your pelvic floor muscles upwards and inwards
5. Breathe in and relax both sets of muscles, again for five seconds
6. Squeeze both sets of muscles while coughing and/or sneezing
Upper tummy muscles with pelvic floor muscles

1. Sit on the floor with your knees slightly bent so your feet are flat on the floor
2. Gradually curl backwards from sitting to lying over five seconds while breathing out and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles
3. Gradually curl backwards to a sitting position over five seconds while breathing in for five seconds
4. Gradually curl backwards from sitting to lying over five seconds while breathing out and squeezing your pelvic floor muscles
5. Gradually curl backwards to a sitting position over five seconds while breathing in for five seconds
6. Gradually curl backwards from sitting to lying over five seconds while squeezing your pelvic floor muscles and holding your upper tummy muscles tight
7. Hold this position and cough or sneeze, trying to keep the cough or sneeze in your upper abdomen
8. Sit up and squeeze your upper tummy muscles and pelvic floor muscles while you cough or sneeze

Adapted from Hulme JA (2002) Beyond Kegels: Fabulous Four Exercises and More - To Prevent and Treat Incontinence: Phoenix Publishing

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