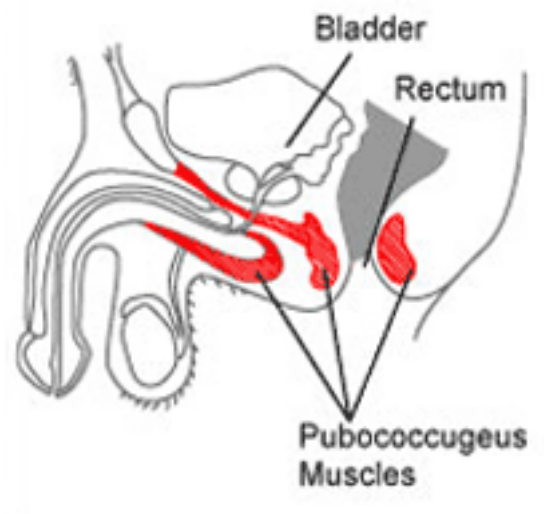


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## Pelvic floor exercises in men: frequently-asked questions

### What is the pelvic floor and why does it become weak?

Many men experience a variety of problems with their urinary system leading to unwanted leakage of urine. Some also have difficulty controlling wind or leakage from the lower bowel. Often this is due to weakness of the muscles of the pelvic floor which have an important function in preventing these problems.



The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle and other tissue, stretching from the tail bone (coccyx) at the back to the pubic bone in front. A man's pelvic floor supports the bladder and bowel. The urethra (water pipe) and the rectum (back passage) pass through the pelvic floor muscles (see the diagram).

### Why do the pelvic floor muscles get weak?

The pelvic floor can be weakened by:

- Some operations for an enlarged prostate gland
- Repeated straining to empty your bowels, usually due to constipation
- Repeated heavy lifting
- A chronic cough such as a smoker's cough, chronic bronchitis or asthma
- Being overweight
- Lack of general fitness

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Neurological damage (e.g. after a stroke, after spinal injury and as a result of multiple sclerosis or diabetes) can also produce poor bladder function. Men in these groups should seek advice from a Healthcare professionals.

Pelvic floor exercises are an important part of preparation prior to surgery for removal of the prostate for cancer (radical prostatectomy). They ensure that the muscles holding urine in the bladder are in good condition; they also reduce the amount and duration of any urinary incontinence after the operation.

## **How do I contract the pelvic floor muscles?**

The first thing you need to do is to identify the muscles that need to be exercised:

- Sit or lie comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, buttock and abdomen relaxed
- Tighten the ring of muscle around the back passage as if you are trying to control diarrhoea or wind. Relax the muscle again. Practice this movement several times until you are sure you are exercising the correct muscles. Try not to squeeze your buttocks, tighten your thighs or contract your tummy muscles.
- Imagine you are passing urine, trying to stop the flow in mid-stream and then re-starting it. If your technique is correct, you will feel the base of your penis move upwards slightly towards your tummy. You can do this "for real" while passing urine but do not do this more than once a week to check your progress, otherwise it may interfere with normal bladder emptying.

## **How do I do pelvic floor exercises?**

- Tighten and draw in the muscles around the anus (back passage) and the urethra (water pipe) all at once. Lift them up inside and hold this position as you count to five. Release the muscles slowly and relax for a few seconds.
- Repeat the contraction and relax again. Once you find it easy to hold the contraction for a count of 5, try to hold it for longer (up to 10 seconds).
- Repeat this for a maximum of 8-10 squeezes. Try to make each contraction strong, slow and controlled.
- Do the same thing again but, this time, using 10 short, fast contractions, pulling up rapidly and immediately letting go.
- Repeat this whole exercise routine at least 4-5 times every day. You can do it in a variety of positions - lying, sitting, standing and walking.
- Try to avoid holding your breath, pushing down (instead of squeezing) and tightening your tummy, buttocks or thighs.

## **Are there any other things that help?**

Once you have learnt how to do these exercises, they should be done regularly, giving each set your full attention. Find at least 5 regular times during the day to do them e.g. after going to the toilet, when having a drink, when lying in bed.

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Tightening the pelvic floor before you get up from a chair, cough or lift anything heavy will also help.

You will probably not notice an improvement for several weeks and will not reach you maximum effectiveness for a few months. Once you have recovered control over your bowel and bladder, continue doing the exercises twice a day for life.

- Share the lifting of heavy loads
- Avoid constipation and straining during a bowel movement
- Seek medical advice for hay fever, asthma or bronchitis to reduce sneezing and coughing
- Keep you weight within the right range for your height and age
- Other methods which have been shown to help some men include biofeedback and electrical stimulation. Consult your urologist or Specialist Nurse for more details.

## **How do I get more information?**

You can obtain more information about continence problems from:

**The Continence Foundation**  
**307 Hatton Square**  
**16 Baldwins Gardens**  
**London EC1N 7RJ**  
**(Phone 020 7831 9831)**  
**[www.continence-foundation.org.uk](http://www.continence-foundation.org.uk)**

## **Who can I contact for more help or information?**

### **Oncology Nurses**

- Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist  
01223 586748
- Bladder cancer Nurse Practitioner (haematuria, chemotherapy & BCG)  
01223 274608
- Prostate cancer Nurse Practitioner  
01223 216574

### **Non-Oncology Nurses**

- Urology Nurse Practitioner (incontinence, urodynamics, catheter patients)  
01223 274608 or 586748

### **Patient Advice & Liaison Centre (PALS)**

- Telephone  
+44 (0)1223 216756 or 257257  
+44 (0)1223 274432 or 274431
- PatientLine  
\*801 (*from patient bedside telephones only*)

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- E mail  
pals@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
  - Mail  
PALS, Box No 53  
Addenbrooke's Hospital  
Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

### **Chaplaincy and Multi-Faith Community**

- Telephone  
+44 (0)1223 217769
- E mail  
derek.fraser@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
- Mail  
The Chaplaincy, Box No 105  
Addenbrooke's Hospital  
Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

### **MINICOM System ("type" system for the hard of hearing)**

- Telephone  
+44 (0)1223 274604

### **Access Office (travel, parking & security information)**

- Telephone  
+44 (0)1223 586969

## **Other information**

This patient information leaflet provides input from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and evidence-based sources as a supplement to any advice you may already have been given by your GP. Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or Specialist Nurse.

## **How can I get information in alternative formats?**

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Polish**            Informacje te można otrzymać w innych językach, w wersji dużym drukiem lub audio. Zamówienia prosimy składać pod numerem: 01223 216032 lub wysyłając e-mail: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Portuguese**    Se precisar desta informação num outro idioma, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio por favor telefone para o 01223 216032 ou envie uma mensagem para: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Russian**            Если вам требуется эта информация на другом языке, крупным

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шрифтом или в аудиоформате, пожалуйста, обращайтесь по телефону 01223 216032 или на вебсайт [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Cantonese** 若你需要此信息的其他語言版本、大字體版或音頻格式，請致電 01223 216032 或發郵件到: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Turkish** Bu bilgiyi diger dillerde veya büyük baskılı ya da sesli formatta isterseniz lütfen su numaradan kontak kurun: 01223 216032 veya asagıdaki adrese e-posta gönderin: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

**Bengali** এই তথ্য বাংলায়, বড় অক্ষরে বা অডিও টেপে পেতে চাইলে দয়া করে 01223 216032 নম্বরে ফোন করুন বা [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk) ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল করুন।



Addenbrooke's is smoke-free. You cannot smoke anywhere on the site. Smoking increases the severity of some urological diseases and increases the risk of post-operative complications. For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free on 0800 169 0 169

## Document history

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