

Patient Resource: Incontinence

What is urinary incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is unwanted or involuntary leakage of urine, no matter how small. You may find that you leak urine with activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing or playing sport. You may also get leakage when you urgently need to go to the toilet, but don't make it in time. Other symptoms you may experience include the constant need to urgently or frequently go to the toilet or waking up more than once during the night to go to the toilet. People with incontinence often know the location of every toilet around!

Why do I get it?

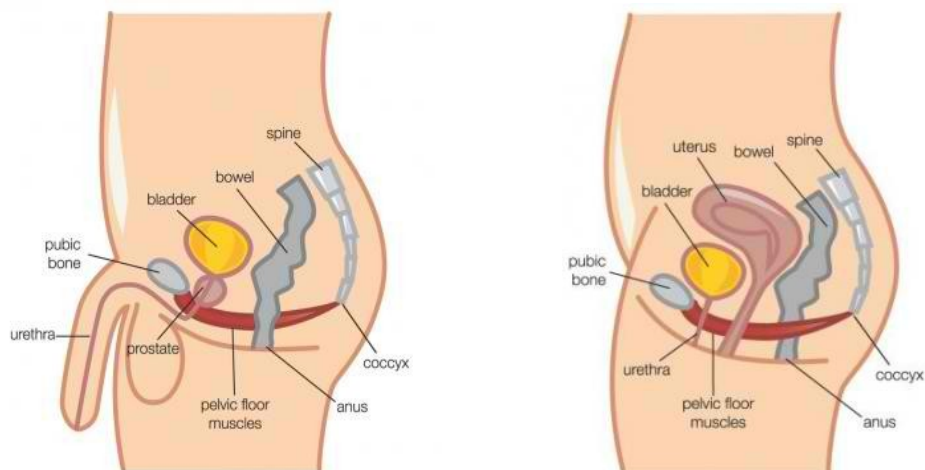
Common causes of incontinence include childbirth, obesity, menopause or the associated straining of persistent heavy lifting, chronic constipation or coughing.

How do I fix it?

Having strong pelvic floor muscles gives us good control over our bladder. Weakened pelvic floor muscles mean that the internal organs are not fully supported and you may have difficulty controlling the release of urine, faeces (poo) or flatus (wind). Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles will help improve your bladder control, reducing incontinence.

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that support the bladder and bowel in men and the bladder, bowel and uterus in women. They stretch like a muscular trampoline from the pubic bone at the front, the tailbone or coccyx at the back and from side to side. These muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control, sexual function and supporting the spine.



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Some physiotherapists have extra training in treating incontinence. Your doctor or physio can help you in finding one of these.

A Women's Health Physiotherapist will ask you questions about your particular problem/s and work out the most appropriate treatment plan. They will accurately assess your pelvic floor muscles and teach you how to train them effectively; improving your strength, endurance and coordination as required. In addition, you may be taught bladder re-training techniques to help you to hold on better.

Quick tips for Pelvic Floor

Firstly, you need to correctly identify the pelvic floor muscles. You can do this in two ways:

- 1) Stopping the flow: When on the toilet, try and slow down or stop the flow of urine. If you can do this, you have correctly identified the muscles around the front passage. Please note this is **NOT** an exercise, do not practice this regularly.
- 2) Visualisation: Imagine that you are trying to hold in wind or control diarrhea by tightening the ring around your back passage.

When doing these, you should feel a definite 'squeeze' and 'lift' of the muscles.

Once you have correctly identified the muscles, try holding this contraction as strongly as you can for 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat this as many times as you can before you feel tired, up to a maximum of 10 repetitions. Make sure you relax for 10 seconds between each one.

Next, do 5-10 short, fast, but strong contractions, holding for only one second.

Repeat this routine 4-5 times/day.

It is important to keep breathing and keep your buttocks and stomach muscles relaxed whilst performing these exercises. However, it is ok if you feel a tightening of your lower abdomen as you contract.

I don't think I'm doing it right!!

Some people are unable to contract their pelvic floor on their own, even if they try very hard! Others feel like they are able to 'squeeze' and 'lift', but when they practice their exercises, they leak more! Women's Health physiotherapists are specifically trained to help you identify the right pelvic floor muscles and teach you how to train them correctly. The exercises can be sometimes difficult to get the hang of, but when performed regularly (not just a twice a week), they can make an enormous difference to your life.

Good luck!! ☺

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