



What do we mean  
by pelvic health?

Pelvic floor  
muscles and how  
to take care of  
them

# PELVIC HEALTH

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

How to take  
care of your  
bladder and  
bowel

When to  
seek help

Our promise  
to you



We are supporting women and birthing people with their pelvic health after the loss of their babies. If you are being affected by pelvic health problems, help and support is available to you. For more information, speak to your bereavement midwife or health care professional, or scan the QR code to visit our webpage, [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/maternity-services/maternity-support/north-central-london-perinatal-pelvic-health-service](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/maternity-services/maternity-support/north-central-london-perinatal-pelvic-health-service).

This leaflet is for women, or birthing persons, after the loss of their baby. At this time, your pelvic health may be the last thing on your mind. However, we hope the information in this booklet will be helpful, either now or later, when the time is right for you.

In this leaflet we will explain what we mean by 'pelvic health', why it is important to be aware of it, how to take care of this area, and when to seek help if you are having symptoms.

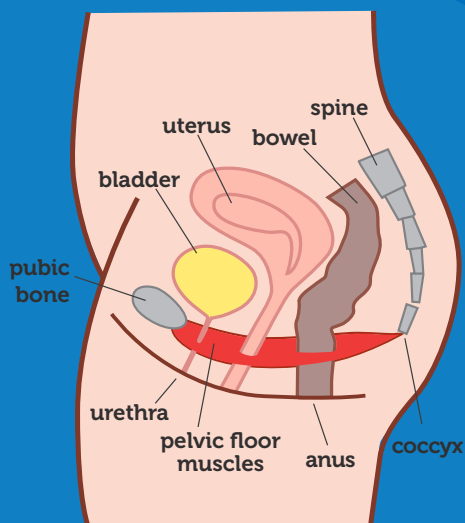
## What do we mean by pelvic health?



Pelvic health is about taking care of a part of your body that some might find embarrassing to talk about.

It's making sure that your pelvic organs (bladder, bowel, womb) and their support systems (pelvic floor muscles and pelvic ligaments) are working as they should.

To sum it up, it describes the state of health, illness, or injury in the pelvic area.



# What are pelvic floor muscles?

These are a group of muscles that span the outlet of your pelvis. Pelvic floor muscles have the following uses:

- They help you to control wee, wind and poo
- They act like a hammock to support your pelvic organs (bladder, womb and bowel) and keep them in the correct position
- When you are ready to be sexually active again, they can help improve sex by increasing your sensation, your grip and orgasm
- They help to keep your pelvis and hips stable.

**Anyone who has been pregnant can be affected by pelvic floor dysfunction. This is when the pelvic floor muscles are not working correctly. You can help prevent problems and recover from your experiences by exercising your pelvic floor.**

## Exercising your pelvic floor

Note: If you have a urinary catheter, wait until it is removed and you're passing urine normally before starting these exercises.

The correct way to contract your pelvic floor muscles is tighten from back to front. In order to do this you can try imagining...

- Stopping wind
- Stopping wee (don't actually stop the flow of urine)

- A lift that is on the ground floor and needs to travel up to the top floor
- A blueberry at the entrance to the vagina and you are trying to draw it up and in
- An escalator, tailbone is at the bottom and you're travelling up the escalator to the pubic bone.

If you find this difficult or feel a vaginal bulging sensation when you try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles, please tell your healthcare professional.



# Recommended routine

## SLOW



### Slow holds (endurance):

- Hold for up to 8-12 seconds
- Relax fully and repeat up to 10 times.

## FAST



### Fast contractions:

- 1 second contraction
- 1 second relaxation (or slow relaxation if difficult)
- Repeat up to 10 times.

## REPEAT



- 3 x day until asymptomatic
- 1 x day or 3-4 x week for life if asymptomatic.

## ENGAGE



Consciously engage pelvic floor muscles before any activity that provokes symptoms. E.g. cough/laugh/sneeze.

## Need a little more help? Try the Squeezy App

Available through your app store, this award-winning app is designed to help you maintain a pelvic floor muscle exercise programme long-term.



# Healthy bladder and bowel

Having a healthy bladder and bowel can help you avoid pelvic floor problems and aid your body's recovery.

## Self care-tips:

- Try and drink 6-8 glasses of water a day. If you don't drink enough, your poo can become difficult to pass
- Try and limit your caffeine intake. It can increase your blood pressure and heart rate, and also increase the urgency and number of times that you will need to wee
- When weeing give your bladder time to empty
- Try and cut out 'just in case wees', aiming for going every 2-3 hours. This will help keep your bladder able to 'hold' for longer periods of time
- Don't strain when you poo, this can weaken the pelvic floor muscles further. If you are finding your poo is difficult to pass, discuss treatment options with your health professional.

## Food & drinks which can irritate the bladder



citrus fruits and fruit juices



blackcurrant juice



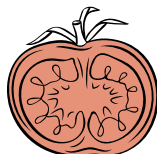
coke and other fizzy drinks



coffee



hot chocolate



tomatoes



green tea



alcohol

# When to seek help...

**If you begin to experience any of the following, we advise that you seek help:**

- Urinary incontinence (leaking wee)
- Overactive bladder (urgency to go to the toilet often)
- Bulge in the vagina, or a heavy dragging sensation (this could be a prolapse, a descent of one or more of the pelvic organs into the vagina)
- Anal incontinence (accidentally pooing yourself or leaking wind)
- Problems with sex, such as having pain or reduced sensation.

# Our promise to you:

**Pelvic health problems are common but not normal, and help is available to you. Please know you can and should ask your health professional for help if you need it – they WILL listen to you – offering the right support or treatment if needed, taking into account your recent loss and medical history.**

Not only that, you can also trust them never to examine you, should it be necessary, without your permission, and you can ask for another person to be present if you wish.

If for any reason, you have to give information about the loss of your baby, they will do whatever you need to feel safe and cared for. For example, you can ask for pen and paper so you can write things down rather than talk, should you wish. Or you can have a trusted other speak on your behalf.