

CARE OF YOUR BLADDER AND BOWELS: PREGNANCY & BIRTH

This leaflet provides information to help recovery following delivery. Our aim will be to help you reduce the risk of changes to your bladder or bowel now and in the future.

Do you have an increased urge to go to the toilet?

Urge problems can develop due to your bladder becoming sensitive to small amounts of urine. Your bladder feels full to you and strong urges to void make you go and empty your bladder more frequently. Consequently, your bladder is taking control. You need to start to retrain your bladder to hold larger volumes of urine and voiding at longer intervals. A normal bladder will hold for 3-4 hours, during this time you get urges to go to the toilet but these can be ignored. You will eventually get a definite feeling to go and empty the bladder.

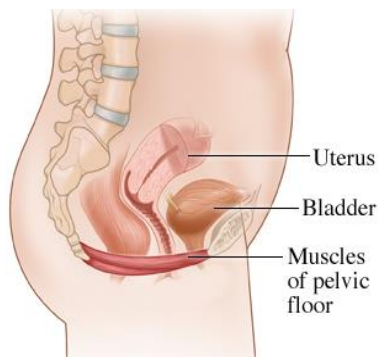
In order to retrain the bladder, try the following;

1. Try to keep calm
2. Use a distraction technique
3. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles for up to 20 seconds.

To begin with, you may only be able to delay the urges by a few minutes. Keep persevering and eventually you will build up the delay to 5 minutes then 10 minutes and so on.

Pelvic Floor exercises

It doesn't matter how you deliver your baby, your pelvic floor muscles will have been weakened. The pelvic floor muscles surround the front and back passage. They help to control the bladder and bowel, stopping any incontinence



How to strengthen the pelvic floor?

1. Sit or lie comfortable and relax the stomach and buttock.
2. Squeeze and lift the muscles around your front passage, vagina and back passage.
3. Imagine stopping the flow of urine or controlling wind.
4. Try performing some short strong squeezes.
5. Additionally, try holding the muscles for up to 10 seconds.

Aim to perform 5-10 squeezes depending on how strong your pelvic floor is.

Relax for 5 seconds in-between.

You will need to perform the whole routine 4-6 times daily.

You will need to perform the whole routine 4-6 times daily.

To make the exercises harder increased the length of the hold and start to do the exercises in an upright position.

How NOT to exercise the pelvic floor

DO NOT stop your urine flow mid-stream as part of an exercise

DO NOT hold your breath/ bear down and strain

DO NOT clench your buttocks

What are the signs of a weak pelvic floor?

- Leaking of urine, wind or faeces
- Heaviness or dragging sensation around the vagina

How long should I do the pelvic floor exercises for?

It takes a minimum of 3 months for the pelvic floor muscles to recover and strengthen.

What if I experience incontinence when I sneeze or cough?

If you experience mild incontinence when you sneeze or cough, your pelvic floor muscles have not yet gained the ability to quickly and strongly contract. You need to practise squeezing the pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can for only a few seconds.

You should also start to squeeze and lift the muscles before you cough, sneeze, laugh and lift heavy objects.

How do I know if I doing the exercise right?

Performing the exercises correctly you will feel the muscles drawing in and upwards. You will also feel the muscles that surround the vagina and anus tighten. The area underneath your belly button may also draw inwards towards your spine.

Bladder irritants

If you find that you leak before reaching the toilet or have regular incontinence, you should try and avoid the following fluids that irritate the bladder;

- Caffeinated tea and coffee
- Citrus fruit drinks (lemon, lime, grapefruit)
- Artificial sweeteners
- Green tea
- Fizzy pop
- Alcohol

You should change these drinks for;

- Water
- Decaffeinated tea and coffee
- Herbal non citrus teas
- High juice (pomegranate, apple, mango, summer fruits)
- Milk (Ovaltine)

It is suggested you limit the amount of fluid you intake to the following;

- 1.5 litres OR
- 3 pints a day OR
- 6 mugs (250ml)

Bowels

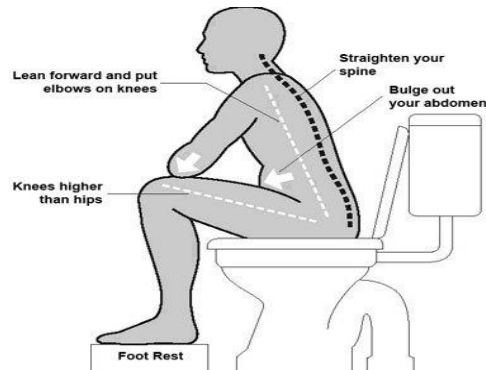
If you suffer from constipation, or if you have to push and strain when opening your bowels, you should try and add natural laxatives into your diet.

Natural laxatives help to hurry digestion of food and the production of faeces through the bowel. These include;

- Prunes
- Apricots
- Pears
- Figs
- Dates
- Liquorice
- Gogi berries

- Dandelion tea and spices

When opening your bowels, the following position has been shown to assist in opening the bowels with more ease and helps to prevent straining



1. Sit down, don't hover
2. Lean forwards from your hips, with your forearms resting on your knees
3. Keep the curve in your spine
4. Get the knees slightly higher than the hips by coming on to the balls of your feet
5. Allow your tummy to relax
6. Take deep breaths - do not hold your breath

If you have a queries contact your physiotherapist who will be happy to advice.

We treat:

- Lower back/groin/hip pain
- Separation of the tummy muscles
- Incontinence

Contact:

Nicky Smith: nicola.smith245@nhs.net

Caroline Larkin: caroline.larkin1@nhs.net

Telephone: 01922721172 ext.7603