



Pelvic floor exercises

For bladder leakage, prolapse, menopause, and before or after surgery

Your pelvic floor

Your pelvic floor is a sling of muscles at the base of your pelvis. It supports your bladder, uterus (womb) and bowel, helps you control wee, wind and poo, and plays a part in sex.

These muscles can weaken with pregnancy and birth, menopause, getting older, a long-term cough, constipation and straining, heavy lifting, and carrying extra weight. Signs include:

- leaking when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise
- a feeling of heaviness or a bulge in your vagina
- rushing to the toilet
- trouble controlling wind

i Pelvic pain? Read this first.

Not every pelvic floor needs strengthening. If you have pelvic pain, pain with sex or when inserting a tampon, vaginismus or vulvodynia, your pelvic floor may be **too tight rather than weak**, and strengthening exercises can make this worse. See a pelvic health physiotherapist, who can teach you to relax these muscles, and discuss it with me before starting the routine below.

Finding the right muscles

- Sit or lie comfortably with your thighs, buttocks and tummy relaxed.
- Imagine you are stopping yourself passing wind and holding in a wee at the same time. Squeeze and lift inside.
- You should feel a squeeze and lift around your back passage and vagina. Your buttocks should not clench, and you should keep breathing normally.
- Don't practise by stopping your wee mid-flow.
- If you can't feel the muscles working, see a pelvic health physiotherapist.

Your daily routine

- 1 Squeeze and lift, then **hold for 6 seconds** while breathing normally.
- 2 **Relax completely for 6 seconds.**
- 3 **Repeat 6 times.** That is one set.
- 4 Do **3 sets a day**, at least **5 days a week**.
- 5 Over the following weeks, **build up to 8-second holds, 12 times** per set.

Squeeze before you strain. Tighten your pelvic floor before you cough, sneeze, laugh or lift.

Give it time. Most women notice a difference after 6 to 8 weeks. Keep going for at least 3 months, or at least 4 months for prolapse, then keep the exercises up for life. Training with a pelvic health physiotherapist works better than training on your own.

Routine based on the Royal Women's Hospital program (April 2025).



What else helps

- **Leaking when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise:** pelvic floor exercises are the first treatment to try, ideally with a physiotherapist, for at least 3 months.
- **Rushing to the toilet or going often:** bladder training (slowly stretching the time between toilet visits) together with pelvic floor exercises. A physio or continence nurse can guide you through a program over about 3 months.
- **Prolapse (heaviness, dragging or a bulge):** a supervised exercise program of at least 4 months can help.. Avoid straining on the toilet and treat constipation. We can also talk about other options, including a pessary.
- **Around menopause:** lower oestrogen can bring on urgency or leakage. Keep up your exercises, and ask me whether vaginal oestrogen could help.
- **Before and after surgery:** a physio visit before prolapse or incontinence surgery helps you learn the technique. Afterwards, follow your instructions about lifting and when to restart.

See a pelvic health physiotherapist if

- you're not sure you're doing the exercises correctly
- you have no improvement after 3 months
- your symptoms are affecting your work, exercise, sleep or sex life
- you have pelvic pain or pain with sex

You don't need a referral, and most extras policies cover it. If you have a long-term condition, ask your GP whether you're eligible for Medicare-subsidised physiotherapy sessions.



Check in with your GP or me if you have

- blood in your urine
- trouble emptying your bladder or bowel
- pain or burning when passing urine, or frequent bladder infections
- a bulge that is sore, bleeds or won't go back in

Go to an emergency department or call 000 if you suddenly lose control of your bladder or bowel and have numbness around your bottom or genitals, or new weakness in your legs.

Trusted resources

WATCH HOW

continence.org.au

Pelvic floor exercises for women

A short 3D animation showing which muscles to squeeze. From Continence Health Australia.



PRINTABLE ROUTINE

healthtranslations.vic.gov.au

Pelvic floor exercises: Royal Women's Hospital

The routine on this sheet, in English and 13 other languages.



URGENCY

continence.org.au

Bladder training

How a bladder training program works, step by step. From Continence Health Australia.



PROLAPSE

continence.org.au

Pelvic organ prolapse

Symptoms, exercises, pessaries and surgery explained. From Continence Health Australia.



FIND A PHYSIO

cfaphysios.com.au

Pelvic health physiotherapist directory

Search by suburb. All listed physios have extra training in pelvic floor care.



OPTIONAL APP

squeezeapp.com

Squeezy

A paid app with reminders and guided sessions, designed by UK NHS physiotherapists. For iPhone and Android.



Also helpful: [Menopause and incontinence](#) (Continence Health Australia) · [Bladder health and pelvic floor muscles](#) (Jean Hailes)

Free advice by phone: National Continence Helpline **1800 33 00 66**. Nurse continence specialists, Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm AEST. Free interpreters are available: ask when you call.

This sheet is general information and does not replace advice about your own health. Sources: Royal Women's Hospital (2025); Continence Health Australia (2026); Jean Hailes (2026); NICE NG123 (2019); Hagen et al., Lancet 2014.

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