



Pelvic floor exercises in pregnancy and after birth

A guide for my pregnancy patients

WHY YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MATTERS

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.

Pregnancy and birth stretch and strain these muscles. Doing pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy, and keeping them up after your baby is born, lowers your chance of leaking urine late in pregnancy and in the months after birth.

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

5 STEPS

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, including when you lift your baby.

Give it time. Most women notice a difference after 6 to 8 weeks. Keep going for at least 3 months, then keep the exercises up for life.

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

AFTER THE BIRTH

Vaginal birth or caesarean: you can usually start gentle squeezes 1 to 2 days after the birth, as long as they don't increase your pain. Start with short, gentle holds and build up to the routine above over the next few weeks.

If a physiotherapist sees you in hospital, follow their advice. It is tailored to you.

Getting active: walking is good from early on. Avoid sit-ups, planks, running, jumping and heavy weights for at least 12 weeks. Have a pelvic health physiotherapy check before returning to running or high-impact exercise (usually 12 to 16 weeks after birth).

SEE A PELVIC HEALTH PHYSIOTHERAPIST IF

- you're not sure you're doing the exercises correctly
- you leak urine, wind or poo, in pregnancy or after birth
- you feel heaviness, dragging or a bulge in your vagina
- you have pain in your pelvis, perineum or with sex that isn't settling
- you had a third or fourth degree tear, or a forceps or vacuum birth
- you want to get back to running, jumping or heavy lifting

A pelvic health physiotherapy check around 6 weeks after birth is worthwhile for everyone. You don't need a referral, and most private health extras policies cover physiotherapy. Check with your fund. Please also tell me about any of these at your appointments.

After the birth, get help the same day if

- you can't pass urine, or you feel your bladder isn't emptying
- you suddenly can't control your bowels or wind
- pain or swelling in your perineum or wound is getting worse, there is a smelly discharge, or the wound opens

In hospital, tell your midwife. **At home**, call the birth suite at the hospital where you gave birth:

Epworth Freemasons **03 9483 3833**
Cabrini Malvern **03 9508 6000**
Jessie McPherson **03 9594 2776**

During pregnancy, for urgent concerns outside business hours: before 20 weeks, call Dr James Aridas on **0459 706 061**; from 20 weeks, call the birth suite at your booked hospital. **In an emergency**, call **000** or go to your nearest emergency department.

Trusted resources

WATCH HOW

Pelvic floor exercises for women

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

continence.org.au



BACK TO EXERCISE

Returning to sport or exercise after birth

A week-by-week guide to getting active again safely. From Pelvic Floor First.

pelvicfloorfirst.org.au



OPTIONAL APP

Squeezy

Reminders and guided sessions, designed by UK NHS physiotherapists. About \$6, one-off, for iPhone and Android. You can adjust the settings to match the routine on this sheet.

squeezyapp.com



PRINTABLE ROUTINE

Pelvic floor exercises: Royal Women's Hospital

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

healthtranslations.vic.gov.au



FIND A PHYSIO

Pelvic health physiotherapist directory

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

cfaphysios.com.au



AFTER A DIFFICULT BIRTH

Birth Trauma Australia

Information and peer support after a physical or emotional birth injury.

birthtrauma.org.au



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.

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This sheet is general information and does not replace advice about your own health. Sources: Royal Women's Hospital, Pelvic floor exercises (2025); Continence Health Australia (2026); Pelvic Floor First (2026); Cochrane review of pelvic floor muscle training in pregnancy (Woodley et al., 2020); Australian Physiotherapy Association, physical birth trauma position statement (2025).