

PATIENT INFORMATION

Stress urinary incontinence

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy information leaflet

There are different types of urinary incontinence, stress urinary incontinence (SUI) is the most prevalent, the national institute for health and care excellence (NICE) state that 24% of women suffer from SUI. This can occur in both women and men and can occur in isolation or with other forms of bladder, bowel and vaginal problems.

Stress Urinary Incontinence is the leaking of urine during an activity which increases the load or strain through the abdominal and pelvic floor muscle. This puts pressure on the bladder, and if the pelvic floor muscles (which support and help to close off your bladder sphincter) are not working properly, urine can leak out.

When can Stress Urinary Incontinence occur?

- Coughing, sneezing and / or laughing
- Exercising – running, jumping, weightlifting
- Bending over
- Standing up from sitting or sitting down
- Walking, especially walking down hill
- Sexual intercourse

Urinary leaking can happen every day with certain activity, or it may only happen when the bladder is full.

What causes stress urinary incontinence?

- **Pregnancy** – due to the hormonal changes with the raised progesterone and the increases in load and pressure on the pelvic floor muscles with the growing foetus
- **Vaginal Childbirth** – some women may sustain some form of perineal injury during childbirth which can affect the pelvic floor muscles and pressure closing around the urethra

- **Smoking / Chronic coughing** – repetitive coughing can fatigue the pelvic floor muscle
- **Perimenopause / menopause** – as the oestrogen levels drop this can affect the pelvic floor muscle stress and reduces the muscular pressure around the urethra
- **Prior to menstruation** – after the ovary has released an egg to travel down to the womb, oestrogen levels drop, and progesterone levels raise. The change in these hormones can reduce the muscular pressure around the urethra
- **Being overweight** – this can increase the abdominal pressure and load on the pelvic floor muscle
- **Heavy lifting at work or home** – weightlifting is very good for you, but if the weight is increased too quickly, or if something is moved which is too heavy then this can increase the abdominal load and pressure on to the pelvic floor muscle.
- **Constipation** - repetitive straining can fatigue the pelvic floor muscles and stretch the supporting tissues around the bladder sphincter.

What can be done to help?

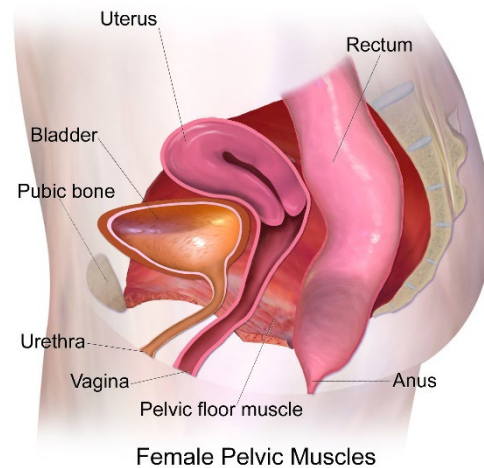
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises
- Try and avoid constipation / straining when on the toilet
- Try and stop or reduce smoking
- Liaise with the GP regarding a chronic cough if this is causing SUI
- Keep a healthy weight, with eating a well-balanced diet and drinking enough water
- Weightlifting within your own capacity and slowly and gradually increasing the weight
- Liaise with the GP if you're going through the perimenopause / menopause / post-menopause and are considering further support with this (for example HRT or vaginal oestrogen)
- General strengthening and conditioning of the gluteal and core muscles
- For further advice on bowels and healthy bladders please go to our webpage – <https://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pelvic-health-physiotherapy/>



Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Sit down on a firm but comfortable seat. Imagine trying to close your back passage as if you were trying to hold in wind. At the same time try and imagine stopping yourself from passing urine. This involves tightening and lifting the muscles around your back passage, vagina and front passage. You should feel a sensation of “squeeze and lift”. There are two exercises you need to do to strengthen the pelvic floor muscle.

- i. Exercise one (Endurance) Slowly tighten and lift the pelvic floor muscle and hold for as many seconds as comfort allows (your goal is to aim for 10 seconds; we do not expect you do this initially) repeat this endurance hold up to 10 times
- ii. Exercise two (Fast) Tighten and relax the pelvic floor muscle as quickly as you can (holding for approximately 1 second). Make sure you relax completely in-between each squeeze (your goal is to aim to repeat this up to 10 times)



Your programme:

Repeat these exercises 3 to 5 times a day.

Slow exercises: Hold for..... secs
 Repeat..... times

Quick exercises: Repeat..... times

It is often useful to use reminders or “cues” throughout the day to remind you to do your pelvic floor muscle exercises. For example, before going to bed, whilst the kettle is boiling, post it notes on your computer screen, after passing urine etc.

The Knack Technique

Often SUI occurs because the pelvic floor muscle is not engaging properly to help to close off the urethra. The knack technique is about helping the pelvic floor muscles remember what they should be doing.

Before an exercise which increases the abdominal load (NOT when trying to open your bowels) like coughing / sneezing / laughing / lifting, activate and engage your pelvic floor muscles to help close off the urethra to reduce the chance of urinary leakage. After a couple of months this will become second nature, and your muscles will naturally activate to close of the urethra as they used to.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are the most frequently prescribed exercises for stress urinary incontinence. However, it can also be useful to strengthen the rest of your muscles around your pelvis, particularly your gluteal muscles. Here are some suggestions / ideas for strengthening up these muscles.

Additional strengthening exercises

1. Bridging

Lie flat on your back, with your knees bent, squeeze your bottom muscles and lift your body upwards. Keep your arms by your side and use them to help you balance. Make sure you maintain good posture (do not over-arch your lower back). Repeat as many times as comfortable



Progression:

Lie flat on your back with your arms by your side, and with your knees bent. Squeeze your bottom muscles and lift your back upwards and straighten one leg. Make sure you maintain good posture (do not over-arch your lower back). Repeat as many times as comfortable



2. Squats

Open your legs slightly wider than shoulder width and bend your knees to the full squat (90-degrees) position. Your feet can be pointing directly forwards or turned out slightly. Make sure you keep the middle of your kneecap in line with the middle toes of your foot. Always keep your feet flat on the ground.

Repeat as many times as comfortable



3. Transverse Abdominus Activation

Lie flat on your back on a bed or the floor and engage your deep core muscles by drawing your belly button inwards (towards your spine slightly), while flattening your spine against the floor. Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat as many times as comfortable



4. Knee folds / Scissors

Adopt position 3. As you exhale lift one foot off the mat, bringing your knee up towards the body to form a tabletop position. Inhale as you maintain this position. Exhale as you slowly return the leg back to the starting position. Maintain your neutral pelvis with your core engaged throughout the exercise.

Repeat as many times as comfortable.



Progression:

Again, start in the same position. For Level 2: exhale and bring both legs up into a tabletop position, one at a time. Inhale to hold, exhale and lower one leg to tap the toe on the floor, and inhale as your leg is lifted back to the tabletop position. Alternate your legs, and make sure you avoid your back arching. Keep your lower abdominals engaged throughout.

5. Dead bug

Lie flat on your back. Raise your arms to 90-degrees in front of you, so your hands are pointing towards the ceiling. Bend your knees and hips to 90-degrees. Engage your deep abdominal muscles and maintain a neutral spine. In a controlled movement, lower one arm to the floor above your head, while you lower the opposite leg to the floor in a straight position. Do not let your lower back arch too much, try to flatten your spine gently towards the floor. Return to the start position.



Repeat as many times as comfortable.

6. 3-point kneeling with knee lifts

Adopt a four-point position on your hands and knees. Maintain good posture, and gently contract the deep abdominal muscles by drawing your belly button in (towards your spine). Lift one knee 2-3 cm from the floor.



Repeat as many times as comfortable.

7. 3-point kneeling with arm lifts

Adopt a four-point position on your hands and knees. Maintain good posture, and gently contract the deep abdominal muscles by drawing your belly button in (towards your spine). Lift one arm in front of you. This exercise strengthens the deep core muscles.



Repeat as many times as comfortable.

8. 2-point kneeling with arm and leg lifts

Adopt a four-point position on your hands and knees. Maintain good posture, and gently contract the deep abdominal muscles by drawing your belly button in (towards your spine). Lift one arm in front of you, and your opposite leg behind you. This exercise strengthens the deep core muscles.



Repeat as many times as comfortable.

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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