

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE CARE: INVISIBLE MUSCLE POWER

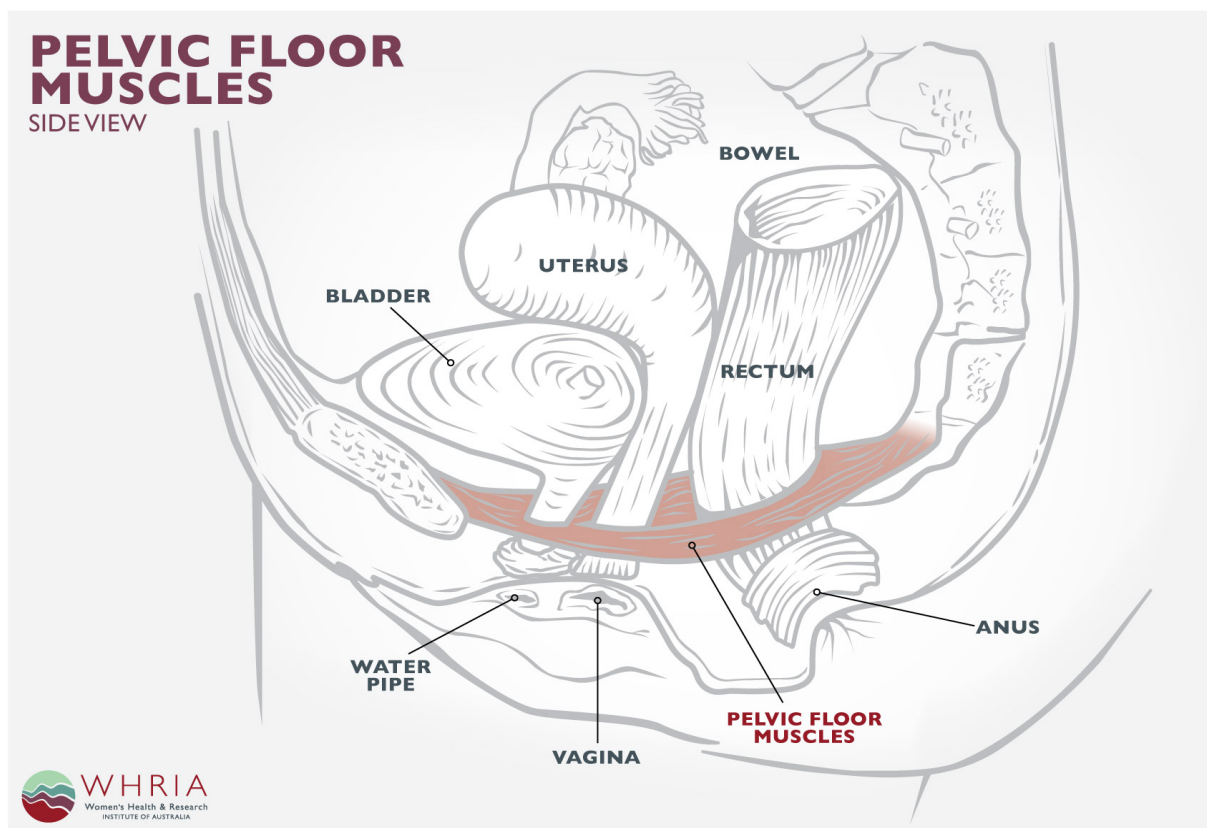
Many women believe that leaking urine is a normal part of being a woman, having a baby or getting older. Some assume that nothing can be done or that surgery is the only answer. Coping with the embarrassment of leaking or prolapse (when an organ bulges down into the vagina) at any stage of a woman's life is a problem many may ignore.

Some men discover they have a problem if their prostate starts to give them grief or they have prostate surgery.

If you find that you are rushing to the toilet often, not quite making it on time, that you are leaking urine when you cough, run or sneeze, that you have given up sport or running around the back yard with your kids or that you can feel a bulge in your vagina, then things are not quite as they should be. If you have a "loo map" in your head that helps you get through the day then maybe it's time to take stock and do something.

INVISIBLE MUSCLE POWER

The pelvic floor muscles form a sling running from the front to the back of the pelvis and help you control your bladder and bowel, support your pelvic organs and contribute to sexual responsiveness. These muscles are completely internal, we cannot see them but they are the same kind of muscle, i.e. voluntary muscle, as our biceps, hamstrings, quadriceps etc. Did you know that between 50 and 80 years of age, if we do not exercise, we lose 50% of our voluntary muscle mass, it's called sarcopenia. But exercise will prevent this loss of muscle mass in our bodies including in the pelvic floor muscles.



These muscles are under strain during pregnancy, childbirth, heavy exercise such as squats and lunges, lifting and pressing heavy weights at the gym, heavy lifting, being overweight and straining to open your bowels.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises: tighten and pull up the muscles around your anus and vagina (for women), and anus and base of bladder (for men) all at once. Can you hold onto this for 5 seconds? Relax completely, try this a few more times and see if your pelvic floor muscles are capable of repeating this effort. Be careful not to hold your breath or use your legs, butt, hips and upper abdominals. Some people, without realizing it, actually do the opposite and hold their breath and bear down. If you are unsure as to whether you are doing pelvic floor muscle exercises correctly you can be assessed by an experienced pelvic floor physiotherapist. If you are having difficulty locating or exercising these muscles, seek help.

Try to do sets of pelvic floor muscle exercises when you are cleaning your teeth, having a shower, waiting for the bus, talking on the telephone or watching the news.

Warning: If you suffer from vaginismus, pelvic or perineal pain, the above exercises are **not for you**. You may well need to be taught pelvic floor muscle relaxation exercises and possibly stretches.

Some people have pelvic floor muscles that are too tight and cause other problems such as difficulty passing urine to completion, pain on urination (not related to bladder infection), obstructed defaecation or difficulty with

bowel evacuation, painful bowel motions, pain with sexual intercourse, pelvic or perineal pain. These conditions are just as much a problem as the bladder control issues discussed above but not as widely recognized.

More Information

See our website for more about:

- Painful Sex
- Vaginismus
- Pudendal Neuralgia