

- To do these, tighten your pelvic floor muscles the same way as before but more quickly, then relax.
- The entire cycle should take about 3 seconds; you should breathe normally and keep the rest of your body relaxed throughout. Do about 20 twice a day, and finish the set with a deep belly-breath. Don't overdo it. These muscles can get tired and sore just like if you did too many squats at one time.

After you have a solid routine of two sets of 10 pelvic floor "holds" and 20 "flicks" you can get more creative.

- If you began by using a tool, now is the time to learn to contract your pelvic floor muscles without the tool.
- Once you have mastered holding for 10 seconds without the tool and without involving your buttock or abdominal muscles while lying down, the next step is to do your exercises sitting up, and after that, standing.
- You can eventually build up to doing them while you do functional tasks like lifting, walking up stairs, jumping, etc. It's important to make sure you're able to contract and relax your pelvic floor muscles without involving other muscles in your body, and while breathing normally, so don't rush the process. If you're not sure you're doing them correctly, check with a pelvic floor therapist.
- If you have a vulva and want to do more advanced exercises, you can add weight (resistance) while you do your exercises. Once you have mastered doing the exercises lying down, the next step is to use a tool and hold it with your hand, then pull slightly outward on it while your muscles work to hold it in.
- If you have a penis you can try hanging a light towel over your erect penis while doing the exercises as another way of adding resistance. The weight of the towel can be increased over time.
- Another method is to use weighted anal tools or balls. Start by first lying down then standing, while allowing the weight of the tool to provide resistance.

Increased tone or Tight Pelvic Floor Muscles:

Increased Pelvic Floor Muscle Tone occurs when the pelvic floor muscles are overly tense, inflexible, or in spasm. The muscles are unable to move and stretch easily with daily activities. This causes uneven stress on the bones where the muscles attach, as well as discomfort of the muscles themselves. The term "increased tone" refers to the presence of high tension in the muscles. This can occur with either strong or weak pelvic floor muscles, and can cause a wide range of problems.

Who is at Risk of Developing Over-tight PFM?

- Athletes, gymnasts, and Pilates enthusiasts who work out with a focus on core strength without adequate time given to relaxation.
- People with high-stress lifestyles and/or difficulty coping with stress. These folks often carry their tension in their pelvis.
- People who have had trauma to their pelvic floor from surgery or sexual abuse.
- People who experience pain with penetration repeatedly. The PFM will start "guarding" the opening and tightening up in anticipation of pain. This prevents penetration or continues the cycle of pain.
- People transitioning through menopause. Estrogen supports muscle function, and estrogen levels decrease during menopause, causing some menopausal women to gradually lose their pelvic floor flexibility. • Women who experience infrequent vaginal penetration. Relaxing to allow penetration helps keep the pelvic floor muscles flexible.
- People who do a lot of pelvic floor exercises without adequate relaxation both during and in between exercises (similar to if you did too many squats and lunges without rest or stretching).

What are the symptoms of increased pelvic floor tone?

- Pain as sexual arousal builds
- Pain with orgasm or no sensation of orgasm at all.
- Pain in the genitals or perineum
- Constipation and/or pain with bowel movements
- Painful urination and/or increased frequency of urination
- Ache in the pelvis from constant muscle stress on the lower spine and tail bone
- Incorrect diagnosis of prostatitis, or prostatitis that is resistant to medical treatment over a period of months or years
- Pain with sexual penetration (vaginal or anal)
- Inability to tolerate wearing tampons or getting a pelvic exam

What should I do if I think I have an increased tone pelvic floor?

There are many conditions that are easily confused with an over tight pelvic floor. We strongly recommend you see your health care provider for a referral to a pelvic floor therapist so you can get an accurate diagnosis. If a diagnosis of pelvic floor tightness or "dysfunction" is made, they will do a thorough assessment and determine the exact portions of the pelvic floor that need attention and then set up a program to address this. We encourage you to work with a therapist rather than attempting to treat this condition on your own.

Your pelvic floor muscles play an active role in your sexual and overall physical health. You can do exercises to maintain their strength and flexibility when you are not experiencing problems and this will help you keep them healthy and flexible. If you have any issues with pain, weakness or any of the other areas described in this brochure, we recommend getting an evaluation from a pelvic floor therapist.

For more information on addressing pelvic pain and maintaining pelvic floor health, please see our web site for books and articles.

Pelvic Floor Health

~What is the pelvic floor?

~What does it do?

~What kind of issues can happen?

~How can issues be managed?



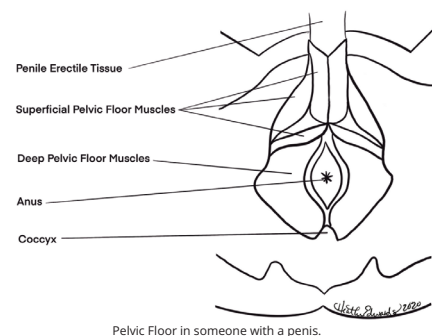
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What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of 14 muscles that forms a supportive sling in the lower pelvis. It is arranged in three layers and attaches to the pelvic bones. The pelvic floor muscle sling separates and supports abdominal organs (intestines, bladder, uterus, etc.) from the genitals.

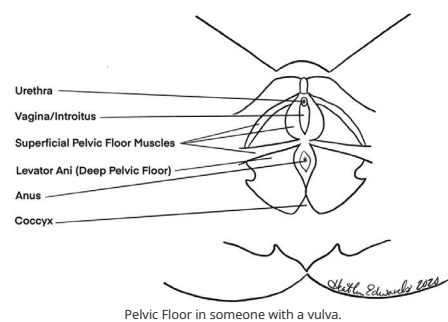


Regardless of genital types (penis, vagina, or intersex variations), the pelvic floor is fairly similar in all bodies. It has openings for the urethra, anus, and vagina. A healthy pelvic floor is strong and flexible. It should be able to contract and relax easily.

In addition to keeping the pelvic organs in place and the pelvic bones stable, the pelvic floor muscles are responsible for:

1. The pleasurable muscle contractions felt in the genitals during **orgasm**. Orgasms may feel stronger with stronger and more flexible pelvic floor muscles.
2. Comfortable penetration (vaginal and anal). Relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles is important for pleasurable penetration. Strength and control can increase pleasure for the one being penetrated as well.
3. Preventing urinary leakage with sudden belly pressure (laughing, coughing, lifting, sneezing, jumping).
4. Keeping stool inside the rectum until you consciously relax your pelvic floor to allow it to pass.
5. Controlling penile ejaculation and separating it from orgasm for those who are interested in doing so.

What does it look like?



Pelvic Floor Challenges

Some people go through life without problems, while others experience troublesome symptoms because their pelvic floor muscles are too weak, too tight, too inflexible, poorly coordinated, or a combination of these. Pelvic floor problems can be divided into two broad categories (though some folks can have issues that fall in both categories):

1. Increased tone
2. Decreased tone

Decreased Pelvic Floor Muscle (PFM) Tone:

Decreased PFM Tone occurs when the pelvic floor muscles are weak, stretched, or damaged without being reconditioned soon after. When this happens, the muscles are may have difficulty holding up the pelvic organs and holding in urine and stool. Orgasms may feel weaker or non-existent, and the muscles tire more easily.

Who is at risk of developing Decreased PFM Tone?

- People who have had pelvic surgery, particularly with access through the perineum
- People who carry a lot of body weight. This can stress the pelvic organs and muscles
- Athletes who experience injury to the perineum from water-skiing, bicycling, or equestrian sports People who have had prostate surgery
- People who have had radiation treatment to the pelvic

region

- People who have carried one or more pregnancies.
- Folks who have given birth vaginally (one or more times)
- People with a family history of pelvic organ prolapse or connective tissue disorders

What are the Symptoms of Decreased PFM Tone?

- Weak or absent orgasms
- Stress incontinence (losing urine or stool when you sneeze, laugh, cough, lift, or exercise)
- Weak ejaculations
- Pelvic organ prolapse or drop (uterus, bladder, or rectum)
- Difficulty controlling gas
- Feeling of heaviness in the lower pelvis

How can I treat or prevent Decreased PFM Tone?

It's important to understand how well your pelvic floor is working. We recommend seeing a pelvic floor therapist to evaluate your pelvic floor function. They are the best at being able to efficiently help you find the correct way to achieve optimal pelvic health.

If you only have the symptom of stress incontinence, then you may be able to treat the weakness on your own. You can also prevent symptoms from occurring in the future and possibly increase sexual pleasure by learning to do some simple pelvic floor exercises.

Here are the directions for doing these on your own:

Find the Muscles

How to do a Pelvic Floor Contraction (for all genders)

1. Lie in a comfortable, reclined position
2. Place your palm under your perineum to feel it lift

when you squeeze

3. Draw "up and in" like you're trying to suck a blueberry up into your anus or vagina
4. Relax down completely and take a big breath into your belly, back and sides to release any tension in the pelvic floor
5. If you have pain, questions or it's nor working as planned, please get a referral to, or find a pelvic floor therapist!

Specific cues for those with penises:

- Try standing in front of a mirror where you can see your penis and scrotum
- Try to draw your "nuts up into your guts"
- Imagine pulling your penis into your body

Specific cues for those with vaginas:

- Imagine pulling your clitoris back into your body
- Try using a hand mirror to watch the vaginal opening retract and then come forward when you relax.
- If you are comfortable doing so, insert a finger into the vagina as far as you can and try to contract the muscles around it.

Tools and Gadgets to Assist:

Vaginal

- Stone Exercise Egg: This provides bio-feedback so you know you are using the correct muscles and working them fully in both contraction and relaxation. Make sure you use nonporous materials and preferably ones with a handle/tail for easy removal. They are meant to be used while lying down. These are not to be worn around; that can cause over-tightening of the PFM and not strengthening of the muscles.
- Energie Exercise Wand: a weighted and curved wand that you insert into the vagina while lying down. You would contract and relax your PFM around it, with the goal of making it bob up and down.
- Pelvic Floor Training set: a set of 3 weighted silicone shapes that you would use with the guidance of a pelvic floor therapist.

Anal

- Aneros Prostate and Pelvic floor devices (several different shapes & sizes, see our web site for choices)

Important Points to Remember:

- If you forget to do your exercises for a few days, don't fret—just get back to them when you get the chance.
- If you have any pain in your pelvis that feels worse while doing the exercise, STOP and contact your health care provider.
- Contact a pelvic floor therapist If there's no improvement in your symptoms after six weeks of consistent practice. t's not uncommon to think you're doing pelvic floor exercises correctly but actually to be contracting buttock or abdominal muscles. Or you may be pushing out your pelvic floor muscles rather than pulling them up. If you think this might be the case, a pelvic floor therapist can help you maximize your efforts.

How to do PFM exercises

Do both slow and quick squeezes

The pelvic floor is made up of two kinds of muscle fibers: slow-twitch (70%) and fast-twitch (30%).

- Start out doing 2 sets of 5 twice a day, holding each contraction for 5 seconds.
- Gradually increase the length of the hold until you can hold it for 10 seconds.
- Increase the number you do each time until you can do 2 sets of 10, holding each for 10 seconds.
- It would go like this: contract and hold for 10 seconds (breathing normally), and then relax for 10 seconds (taking a deep belly breath). Repeat the sequence until you've completed 10 exercises.
- Rest for a few minutes and then do another set of 10 in the same way. Repeat this sequence again later in the day.
- Slow-twitch fibers (70%) respond best to slow, step-by-step engagement like the holds we have described. If you only do fast pelvic floor squeezes, you're not strengthening the majority of the muscle fibers. That's why it's important to learn to do the pelvic floor "hold" as described above.
- The other 30% of muscle fibers are important too, so we recommend that once you're comfortable with the pelvic floor squeeze "hold," you learn quick "flicks."

(Continued on reverse)