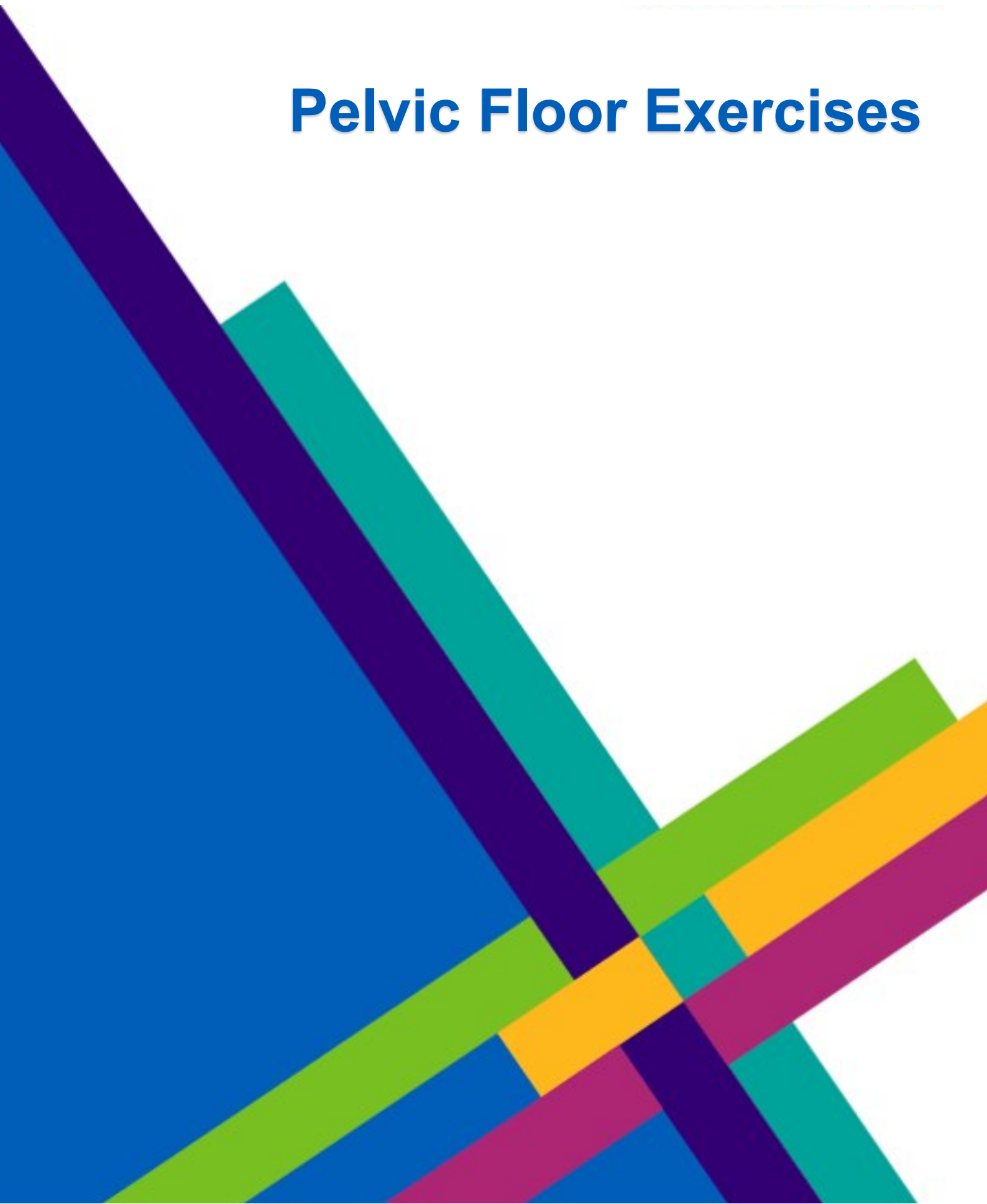




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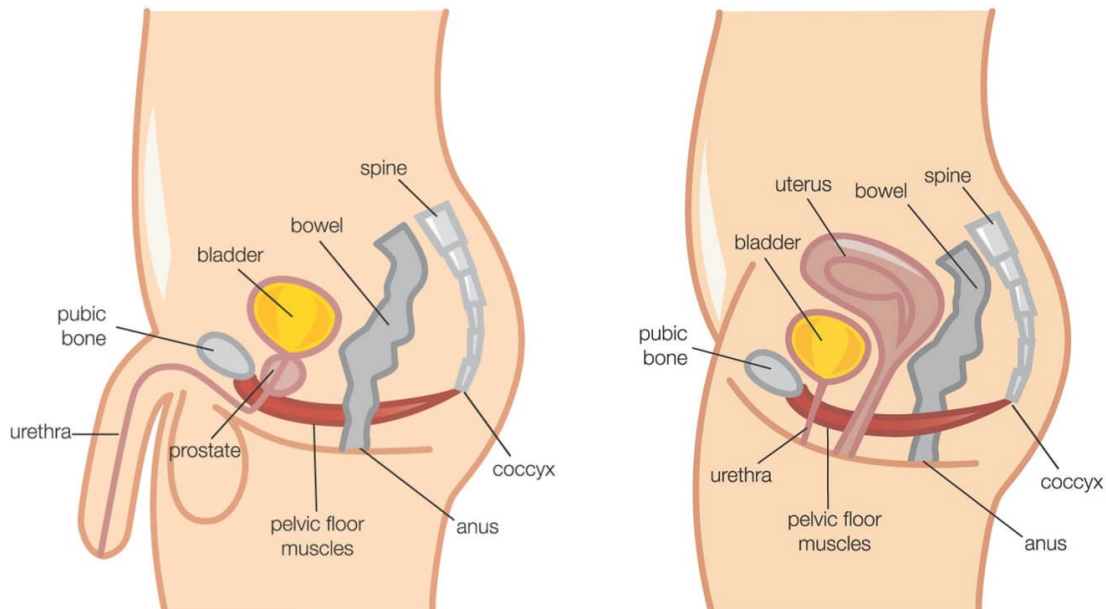
# Pelvic Floor Exercises



## What are pelvic floor muscles?

Pelvic floor muscles are the layer of muscles that support the pelvic organs and span the bottom of the pelvis -they stretch like a muscular trampoline from the tailbone to the pubic bone and across both sides.

Just like a trampoline, the pelvic floor is able to move down and up, these muscles are normally firm and thick.



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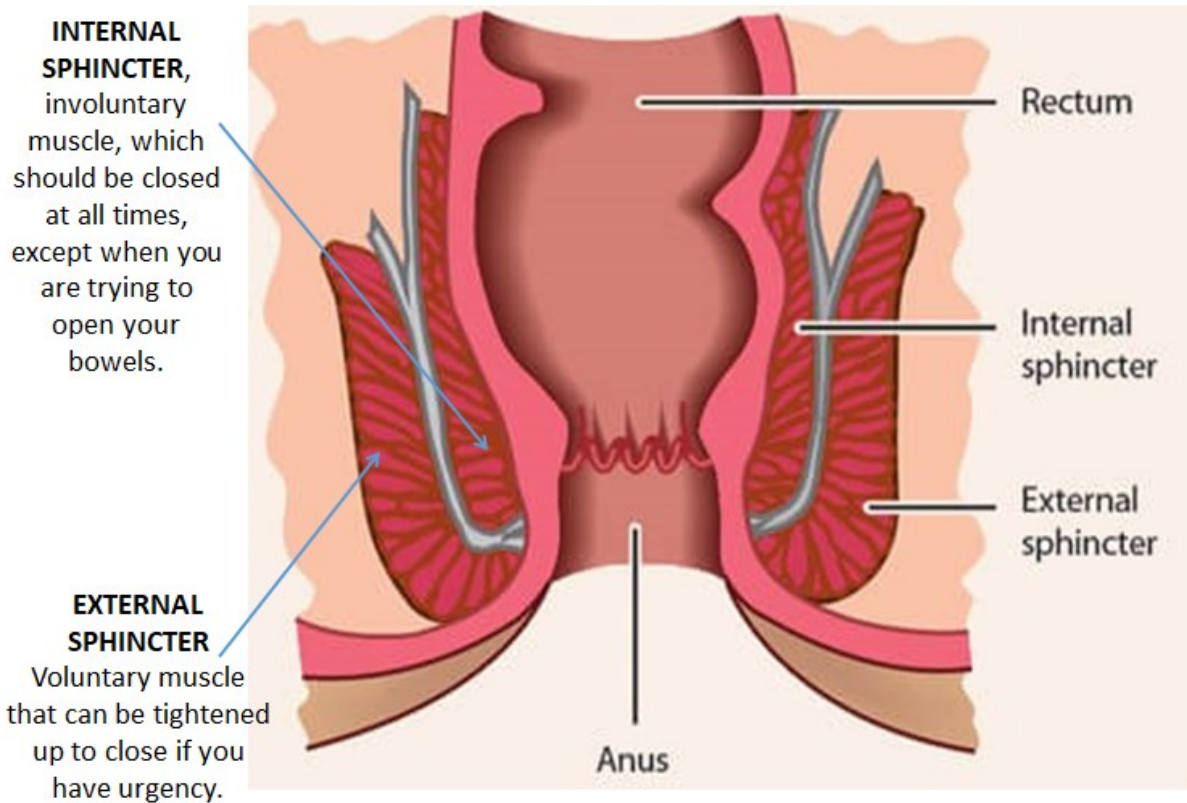
These muscles provide support to the organs that lie on it - in men that's the bowel and bladder and in women, that's bowel, bladder and uterus - each organ has a passage through the pelvic floor muscle.

These muscles normally wrap quite firmly around these passages to help keep them shut. Along with core stability; they help support the bowel and bladder in men and bladder, bowel and uterus in women.

The back passage (anus) has two rings of muscle around it. The inner ring is the internal sphincter, an involuntary muscle, which should be closed at all times, except when you are actually trying to open your bowels. This is normally automatic, you don't have to think about doing it.

The outer ring of muscle is the external sphincter, which is a voluntary muscle which you can tighten up to close it more firmly if you have urgency or diarrhoea.

Both muscles wrap right around the anus. When a stool comes into the rectum the internal sphincter relaxes and allows the stool to enter the top part of the anus. Very sensitive nerves in the anal canal can tell you if it is gas or stool waiting to come out.



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If it is stool, you squeeze your external sphincter to stop it from coming straight out. This squeezing moves the stool back into the rectum, where it waits until you get to the toilet.

Either or both of these muscles can become weak. This may be because of childbirth, bowel surgery, being constipated and straining or general wear and tear.

Sometimes there is no obvious reason why. If you have weak muscles and cannot squeeze enough to hang on, you will feel urgency and may leak gas, liquid or even solid stool.

### What can pelvic floor exercises help with?

Pelvic floor exercises help strengthen the muscles used in bowel control. They may help with:

- urgency
- bowel control
- difficulty emptying your bowel completely
- bladder control
- sexual function.

## How do I identify the pelvic floor muscles?

The first step in performing pelvic floor muscle exercises is to identify the correct muscles:

- Find a comfortable position sitting, standing or laying down
- Imagine you need to pass urine or wind and try to tighten only those muscles - see if you can squeeze in and hold the muscles inside the pelvis while you breathe
- It's fine to feel tightening of your lower abdominal (tummy) muscles whilst doing these exercises but you need to avoid tightening your buttocks and inner thighs.

## How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

It is important to make sure you let-go between repetitions of exercises to ensure recovery and to avoid fatigue. Breathe normally and try to avoid holding your breath whilst doing these exercises.

1. Pull the muscles up (like raising an internal lift) to a level you feel comfortable to hold. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
2. Pull the muscles up faster and then release in quick succession, relax for 5 seconds between contractions. Repeat 10 times.
3. Try to do these at least 3 times daily.

Like any other muscle it takes time to strengthen and you won't notice a difference for several weeks. Stick to regular exercises and make it part of your daily routine.

## Further information

For any further information, please speak to your Colorectal Clinical Nurse Specialist on 01722 425 194 (direct line).

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