

Your Pelvic Floor

Your pelvic floor muscles lie like a hammock or sling below your pelvis and pass around and between your urethra (where you pass urine) and your anus (where you pass a bowel motion). They support your internal organs. Not sure how to find your pelvic floor muscles? Try:

- coughing into your fist; the “kick” you feel is the pelvic floor muscles bulging around the vagina; *or*
- imagining you need to use the toilet or pass wind; the muscles you tense to stop yourself are your pelvic floor muscles.

You might find it easier to find your pelvic floor muscles while lying down or standing instead of sitting. Find what works for you.

Why Do Pelvic Floor Exercises?

They help your baby to descend during birth. Well-toned pelvic floor muscles help guide the baby’s head and help it rotate during the second stage of labor. If the muscles are slack the second stage may be prolonged.

They make sex even better. Well-toned pelvic floor muscles can make intercourse more enjoyable for both men and women, especially after childbirth.

They help to prevent stress incontinence. Some women find after they’ve had a baby that they leak a little urine when they laugh, cough, or sneeze. Practicing pelvic floor exercises before and after the birth of their babies can help prevent this.

They hasten healing after birth. Your perineum (the area of skin between the vagina and the anus) can heal more quickly if you practice pelvic floor exercises.

How to do Pelvic Floor Exercises

1. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles as tight as you can for about four seconds. Release. Repeat once.

2. Now imagine your pelvic floor is a lift. Tighten the muscles slowly as if you were raising the lift to the first floor. Hold for a few seconds, then take the lift to the second floor. If you can, go to the third or even fourth floor.
3. Now descend the lift, relaxing the muscles gradually, stopping at each floor for a few seconds.
4. When you have returned to the starting point, push the muscles down as if you were sending the lift to the basement.
5. Remember to breathe throughout the exercises – don't hold your breath!
6. Do 4-5 sets, 8-10 times per day, and continue *for life!*

It can be difficult to remember to do the exercises regularly. Try connecting doing pelvic floor exercises with something you do often, such as use water (make coffee, wash your hands, brush your teeth, do the dishes, swim, and so on), or stop at a red light or answer the phone at work. Or you can use visible reminders – put sticker dots around the house and do your exercises every time you see one of the dots.

Where is the perineum?

The perineum is the skin around the entrance to the vagina. During childbirth the perineum stretches to allow the baby's head to be born. If a woman has an episiotomy (a cut) during labor, it is made to the perineum to provide more space.

What is perineal massage?

Perineal massage is stretching the skin to improve the elasticity of the tissues and to accustom the woman to the sensation of stretching that she feels when her baby's head is born.

Can perineal massage help to prevent a tear or an episiotomy?

There is not currently any evidence that massage will help to prevent a tear or the need for an episiotomy. However, there is also no indication that it does not help. Although it may not prevent a tear, it will help to improve the stretchiness and it will desensitize you to the pressure of stretching.

How do I do perineal massage?

Most women find it easiest to massage the first few times looking in a mirror. Using a natural vegetable oil for lubrication on your thumbs, lie back and insert the thumbs 3-4 cm into the vagina. Press the vaginal opening towards your rectum and the sides. Gently stretch the opening until you feel a burning or tingling sensation and a slight feeling of numbness. Ease the pressure then gently massage in the oil. If you have previously had an episiotomy or a tear concentrate on any scarring where the tissues are less elastic.

How often should I do the massage?

Start the massage once a day from about 36-37 weeks of pregnancy and continue until you go into labor.

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