

Pelvic floor muscles in women with Cystic Fibrosis

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor muscles form a hammock between the pubic bone at the front and the coccyx (tailbone) at the back. Through these muscles are the openings for the bladder, front passage (vagina) and back passage (anus).

If these muscles become weak, support for these structures becomes affected and the openings will not be so tight. If for example you cough or run the muscles are put under stress and urine may leak out of the bladder. This is called stress incontinence.

Why do the muscles weaken?

Any activity that increases the pressure in the abdominal cavity can weaken the pelvic floor muscles. For example:

- Coughing/sneezing
- Chest physiotherapy techniques
- Lifting
- Vomiting
- Laughing
- Aerobic exercise (jumping / running)
- Tummy exercises

If you are pregnant the effect of changing hormones and the weight of your growing baby sitting on your pelvis floor muscles can weaken them. Further weakness occurs following a vaginal delivery as the muscles are stretched when the baby is born.

Bed rest can cause all the muscles in the body including those of the pelvic floor to weaken.

Many women suffer from pelvic muscle weakness and subsequent stress incontinence. If you are a woman with cystic fibrosis you may be more at risk for the above reasons.

How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

Step 1

Sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind. Squeeze the muscles around your back passage. Your buttocks legs and muscles should not move.

Step 2

Next imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing urine. This should feel similar to step 1. Once you have done this you can start the exercises.

Step 3

You can measure the strength of your muscles by doing the **stop test**. Next time you go to the toilet to pass urine try to stop the flow. Then relax and empty your bladder completely. Only do the stop test once a fortnight at the most. Doing it more than once may increase the chance of getting a bladder infection.

The exercises.

As your pelvic floor works in two different ways they must be exercised in two different ways.

- **The slow squeeze.**

Tighten your muscles (step 2) hold it tight for 5 seconds then relax. Repeat this at least five times.

- **The fast squeeze.**

Tighten the muscles up quickly (step 2) and then relax. Do this for five times. Gradually increase the hold time as you get stronger and increase the repetitions up to ten times for each exercise.

When should I do the exercise?

Every woman should do them daily. Aim for 6-10 times a day. It is difficult to remember when you first start. It may help to think of something you do regularly for example having a drink or washing your hands and exercise every time you do one of these activities.

- You should always tighten your muscles when you are coughing, huffing or sneezing, laughing, lifting and running.
- You should continue these exercises even if you are unwell as the as the muscles weaken just like any other muscle with reduced activity.

Important note

If you already have symptoms of stress incontinence you may need to be seen by a specialist physiotherapist. You can be referred via your GP or CF doctor. Please discuss this matter with any member of the CF team.

Contact us:

If you are concerned about any of the points raised in this leaflet or have any further queries please speak to your consultant or the CF team.

Information for Patients

Additional Information Sources:

For more information on all aspects of living with Cystic Fibrosis you can visit the Cystic Fibrosis Trust web site at: www.cftrust.org.uk

For local news and events the West Midlands Regional Cystic Fibrosis Unit based at Heartland Hospital has its own website at: www.heartlandscf.org.uk

Our commitment to confidentiality

We keep personal and clinical information about you to ensure you receive appropriate care and treatment. Everyone working in the NHS has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential. We will always ask you for your consent if we need to use information that identifies you. We will share information with other parts of the NHS to support your healthcare needs, and we will inform your GP of your progress unless you ask us not to. You can help us by pointing out any information in your records which is wrong or needs updating.

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may want to ask: