Your pelvic floor: what happens when it’s weak

Your pelvic floor muscles give you control over your bladder and bowel. They also hold your bladder, bowel and uterus in place.

If you have weak pelvic floor muscles, you might feel heavy around your bottom, have trouble controlling wind, or leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise. You might also feel an urgent need to urinate.

Pregnancy and birth can lead to weak pelvic floor muscles. So can constipation, if it means you strain when you have a bowel movement. Fruit, vegies and water can help with constipation.

How to strengthen your pelvic floor

Go to the toilet when your bladder feels full – not ‘just in case’. When you sit on the toilet, relax and lean forward. Put your feet close to the toilet and keep them flat on a step on the floor.

Do pelvic floor exercises. Squeeze, lift and hold, as if you’re trying to hold in urine or wind. Do a set where you hold for as many breaths as you can, and repeat 3-5 times. Do a set of 10 strong, quick squeezes and lifts.

At the end of each hold and each set, let your muscles relax. Avoid tensing your shoulders or buttocks during the holds. You can do the exercises sitting, lying down or standing. Aim to do three sets a day.

Hints and tips for pelvic floor care

Remembering to do the exercises can be tricky. Try doing them whenever you have a shower, wash your hands or brush your teeth.

Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles and hold them before you cough, sneeze, squat or lift anything. This prepares and protects your pelvic floor.

If you need help with exercises or have any worries, talk to a physiotherapist, your GP, or the National Continence Helpline on 1800 330 066.