

INFORMATION SHEET 22: PELVIC FLOOR AND MEN

Why should men do pelvic floor exercises ?

A strong pelvic floor muscle is important for men too. Women have been encouraged to exercise their pelvic floor muscle for decades, but now we understand that it is just as vital for men, and especially for men with specific health issues. Research has found that

- a strong pelvic floor overcomes erectile dysfunction (Uni of Bristol study, 2004)
- a regular program of pelvic floor exercise achieves the same success rate as Viagra (Uni of Bristol study, 2004)
- pelvic floor exercises is a safer option than drugs; Viagra is associated with damage to the eyes and vision in a significant number of men using it, but exercises are safe for everyone (May 2005).
- medications are much more costly than an exercise program.
- pelvic floor exercise can "increase awareness of sexual sensations and enhance enjoyment" (Impotence Association, UK)
- pelvic floor exercises can bring a dramatic improvement for men who experience dribbling after urinating (Uni of Bristol study, 2005)
- pelvic floor exercises are strongly recommended for men following a prostatectomy; research has shown that pelvic floor strengthening can improve sexual function and overcome incontinence.

How to identify the pelvic floor muscles

The Australian Department of Health and Ageing provides guidelines on pelvic floor exercises for men. They recommend that the first step is to find the appropriate muscles around the anus and the urethra.

- Start by sitting or laying comfortably with the muscles of your thighs, bottom and stomach relaxed. Tighten the ring of muscle around your anus without squeezing your bottom.
- To feel these muscles around the urethra, try to stop your flow of urine mid-stream, and then restart it.

You should only do this to find which muscles to use, or to check your progress. Don't practice this more than once a week, or it could affect your ability to pass urine.

How to exercise the pelvic floor muscles

Once you can feel your pelvic floor muscles working, you can attempt to exercise them.

- Tighten and draw in the muscles around the anus and urethra, lifting the muscles up inside.
- Count to five, then release and relax. The Department says you should have a 'definite feeling of letting go'.
- Their guidelines recommend men repeat this up to maximum of 8 to 10 squeezes, resting for 10 seconds after each tightening of the muscles.
- You should follow this by 5 to 10 short, strong squeezes in quick succession.
- Repeat the slow and quick squeezes around four to five times a day.

Need more help to exercise?

In spite of the guidelines, it's very hard to identify, isolate and exercise pelvic floor muscles without help. Exercise aids and devices provide the little extra help that turns your effort into success. Books and DVDs provide ongoing guidance and support to help you achieve real results. Devices assist you in strengthening the pelvic floor in two main ways:

- Exercisers can provide "resistance"

This is commonsense. Body builders do not build strong biceps by repeatedly contracting their arms in the air; they do it by using weights or other devices that provide resistance.

- Exercisers can provide feedback that the exercise is being done correctly

Many men and women find it extremely hard to do anal pelvic floor contractions correctly, especially when they first begin, so they benefit from using a device that confirms that the correct muscle is being exercised and that the contraction is being fully held for maximum benefit. Physiotherapists use such exercise aids and devices to assist in teaching correct exercise techniques, but they are also available for you to use in the privacy of your own home through Pelvic Floor Exercise, either online or by mail order.

Products of particular interest to men include:

- Orgawell's Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men DVD
- Curing Incontinence by Peter Dornan (book)
- Living and Loving after Prostate Surgery by Prof Grace Dorey (booklet)
- PFXA
- Pericalm plus Anuform electrode
- Peritone plus Anuform electrode

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