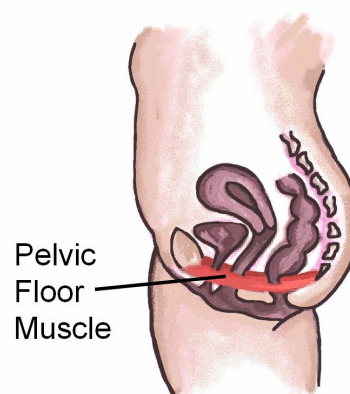


Your Pelvic Floor

What is it?

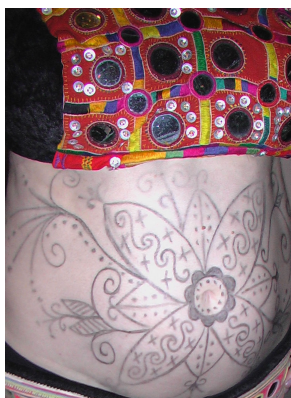
A sling of muscles that hold your internal organs in your abdomen. While you are pregnant, they may stretch and weaken, causing incontinence.



Types of incontinence:

Urgency – need to go but none there!

Stress- dribble when you sneeze/cough/jump



What can be done?

Pelvic floor exercises

- Lift your pelvic muscles from the inside and aim to hold your contraction for up to 10 seconds – NOTE- This is an *aim!* ... initially try to do up to 10 contractions twice a day, and hold them for as long as you can (if 2-3 seconds is all you achieve – that's a great start). *Do not 'over-do' your exercises.* When you can hold them for 10 seconds, do more contractions throughout the day as you remember them.

There are 2 types of muscle fibres in your pelvic floor – the *endurance* fibres that help to hold for up to 10 seconds, and your *fast twitch* fibres. Once you can hold your pelvic floor muscle contractions for about 6 seconds, you can start exercising the fast twitch fibres as well. That simply means contracting faster – on-off-on-off-on-off ... as well as remembering your holding exercises.

Lower tummy exercises (core exercises)

- your inner corset of muscles are also important. These muscles work in conjunction with your pelvic floor. Draw your belly button in (without holding your breath) and hold. This is a subtle movement that can be done with your pelvic floor exercises up to 3-4 times a day.

Good bladder and bowel habits

Bladder health can be improved by drinking 1.5-2L water per day. If you are not doing this already, increase your volume *slowly*. Try to reduce your intake of bladder stimulants such as caffeine, bubbly drinks and alcohol.

It is normal to pass urine 4-6 times per day and 0-2 times at night (depending on our age). Volumes are usually around 300-350mL, and we should be able to wait for 2-3 urges before we go to the toilet to pass urine. Our bowels should always be opened at our 1st urge.

Correct positioning on the toilet is something else to think about. There is a position of 'least stress' on our pelvic floor. Try to have your knees higher than your hips, bulge your belly out and breathe out at the same time to reduce strain.

Further help

- Continence Foundation of Australia ph 1800 33 00 66 <http://www.continence.org.au/>
- Women's Health Physiotherapist - A women's health physiotherapist will be able to help you with all of these muscle groups - and ensure that you are exercising them properly. Check your local directory.
- Also see video here <http://www.birthingsense.com/newsletters/pelvicfloor/index.html>



Avoiding or improving your incontinence starts now!

Look after your pelvic floor with these strategies!