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The Pelvic Floor

With thanks to Anne Tison

A healthy pelvic floor is crucial at all stages of a women's life. Bringing tone and vitality to your pelvic floor will help protect you from many potential health problems. By exercising your pelvic floor you will help to strengthen the muscle that supports the vagina, urethra, bladder, uterus and rectum. In turn this could dramatically alleviate urinary incontinence, support childbirth and discourage pelvic disease and menstrual problems. For pregnant women these exercises help the body to cope with the increasing weight of the baby. Healthy, fit muscles pre-natally will recover more readily after the birth. Remember, the pelvic floor muscles act as a guide during delivery of your baby and are responsible for turning and guiding the baby's head as it moves down through the birth canal and into the outside world.

Practicing and feeling your Pelvic Floor

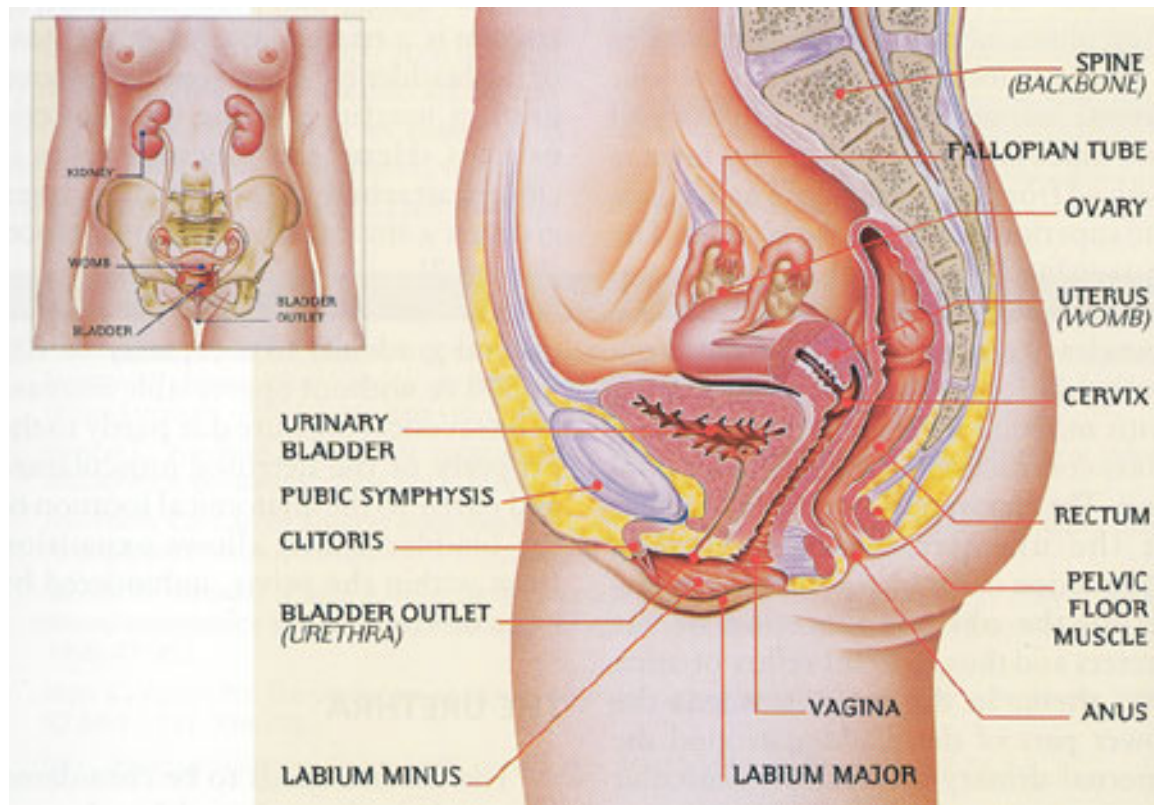
- With your breath natural and relaxed, become aware of the lower pelvic region. Focus your attention on the pelvic floor.
- Tightening and drawing in around the anus, the vagina and the urethra all at once, lifting them UP inside.
- Try and hold this contraction strongly as you count to 5 then release and relax. You should have a definite feeling of 'letting go'.
- Repeat ('squeeze and lift') and relax. It is important to rest for about 10 seconds in between each contraction. If you find it easy to hold for a count of 5, try to hold for longer - up to 10/15 seconds. Repeat this as many times as you are able up to a maximum of 8-10 squeezes.
- Now do five to ten short, fast, but strong contractions.

Vajroli Mudra (thunderbolt attitude) - Urethral squeezes

- Close your eyes and relax the body.
- Feel or imagine that you are trying to restrain urination, then relax completely. You will feel the outer vaginal muscles and the hood of the clitoris move.
- Try not to contract the other muscle groups in the pelvic floor.
- Contract and relax with awareness of the breath - the point of maximum inhalation is the point of maximum contraction.
- Repeat as many times as you can up to a maximum of 25 times.

Moola Bandha – Vaginal squeezes

- Close your eyes and relax the body.
- Focus your attention on your vagina.
- Inhale deeply and on the exhalation contract the muscles of the vaginal passage only by drawing them in and up. (If you are not sure that you are doing this right, insert a finger in the vagina and as you contract the vagina you should feel the finger being squeezed. Inhale and relax.
- Repeat as many times as you are able to up to a maximum of 25 times.





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Ashwini Mudra (horse gesture) – Anal squeezes

- Close your eyes and relax the body
- Imagine that you are trying to hold a wind or prevent defecation.
- As you inhale, slowly contract the anal muscles. Make sure you contract only the anus and that the vagina and urethra stay relaxed. Then slowly release as you exhale.
- Repeat as many times as you can up to a maximum of 25 times.

While doing the exercises:

- DO NOT hold your breath.
- DO NOT push down instead squeeze and lift up.
- DO NOT tighten your tummy, buttocks or thighs.

Do your exercises well - the quality is important. Fewer good exercises will be more beneficial than many half hearted ones. Once you have learnt how to do these exercises, they should be done regularly, giving each set your full attention. It might be helpful to have at least five regular times during the day for doing the exercises. For example, after going to the toilet, when having a drink, when lying in bed. Since all the muscles you are exercising are internal you can do it while doing other tasks, and no one need know.

Once you can do the lift exercise, try changing the speed you do the pull ups for greater flexibility and control. Do four tightening, followed by four quick pull-ups, and then four more tightening.

After your baby is born, pelvic floor exercises will help get the blood flowing through bruised or damaged soft tissues and help with healing. Start moving your pelvic floor as soon as you can; the muscles will have stretched and they may feel much less responsive. By squeezing and relaxing the muscles as often as you can you will improve the strength and control.