

URINARY INCONTINENCE & EXERCISE

PUBLIC

WHAT IS URINARY INCONTINENCE?

Urinary incontinence (UI) – or the involuntary leakage of urine – is common in women. There are some things that can cause it, or make it worse: pregnancy and childbirth, menopause, prolapse, chronic respiratory conditions, ageing, obesity, smoking, constipation, diabetes, and depression.

WHY IS EXERCISE IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE URINARY INCONTINENCE? HOW DOES EXERCISE HELP?

Exercise has many important benefits, including:

- Increasing fitness, strength and endurance
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Improving mental health and quality of life

A Physiotherapist or Accredited Exercise Physiologist will be able to assist with designing an exercise program to achieve these goals. A suitably trained pelvic health physiotherapist can assess and manage symptoms of UI.

Regular exercise (most days of the week) is important because not exercising is linked with obesity, diabetes, lower back pain and depression. These problems can make UI worse.



WHAT TYPE OF EXERCISE IS BEST AND HOW TO DO IT?

Aim to achieve activity levels recommended in the Australian National Physical Guidelines (1). Choose forms of exercise that are enjoyable and comfortable. If you would like to begin or continue an exercise routine that includes high impact or lifting heavy weights, but experience UI symptoms during these movements, it is recommended that you see your GP for a referral to a suitably trained pelvic health physiotherapist.

In addition to regular exercise, it is recommended that you start a pelvic floor muscle training program (PFMT) to improve pelvic floor strength, endurance, power, and relaxation – all of which can help to improve symptoms of UI (2).

What to do and how to do it	What to avoid and when to seek help
<p>Pelvic Floor Muscle Training (PFMT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with at least 12 weeks of pelvic floor muscle strengthening exercises• Most days of the week• 3 series of 8-12 exercises (3) <p>How to do it</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Start seated, maintaining a 'neutral spine' (4).2. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind by squeezing the anus (5).3. Try a combination of gentle, longer squeezes (work up to 10-15 seconds), maximal squeezes (as hard as possible for 5-10 seconds), and 'quick fire' squeezes.4. Relax the muscles completely in between squeezes (healthy muscles can squeeze and relax fully).	<p>Avoid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bearing down or straining during pelvic floor exercises• Squeezing your legs and buttocks at the same time during pelvic floor exercises• Breath holding during exercise (especially heavy weight lifting) without expert instruction (6) <p>Seek Help (from a general practitioner or pelvic health physiotherapist)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you experience pressure, heaviness or a bulge in the vagina and/or rectum• If you experience back and/or pelvic pain during exercise• If you are unsure you have the correct technique

HELPFUL TIPS:

- Relax the pelvic floor muscles as you breathe in and squeeze the pelvic floor muscles in and up as you breathe out (7). It may also be helpful to breathe out and squeeze the muscles in and up before certain movements (e.g., standing up, lifting something heavy, jumping). This is known as ‘the Knack’.
- If you find it hard to feel what the pelvic floor muscles are doing, you can try sitting on an exercise ball while doing your exercises as this will give you some physical feedback. As you squeeze in and up, you should feel the perineum gently lift away from the ball, and vice versa as you relax.
- Pelvic floor muscle training is best supported by a healthcare practitioner, like a pelvic health physiotherapist, especially if you do not think you have the correct technique or don't notice any improvement after 12 weeks of PFMT.



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RELATED INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

Exercise is Medicine Australia www.exerciseismedicine.org.au
Exercise Right www.exerciseright.com.au

Find a Physiotherapist www.choose.physio

Find an Accredited Exercise Physiologist www.essa.org.au

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