Training your pelvic floor muscles
Training the pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are often overlooked in the training regimes of both men and women. These muscles often first come into conversation with pregnant or post natal women and men with pelvic issues or post-surgery from prostate cancer. In many cases this is too late.

The purpose of highlighting this area is to raise awareness about pelvic floor exercises for both men and women and the connection these muscles have to core strength. The benefits of doing these exercises can be life changing and benefit both sexes greatly.

Where are they?

Your pelvic floor muscles line the base of your pelvis. They support your internal organs and connect to your core muscles. These muscles form a broad sling which runs from the front to the back of the pelvis and across the pelvis from one sit bone to another.

It is important that they are firm and strong. If they become weak you may experience leakage from your bladder or bowel when you jump, cough, laugh, sneeze, lift or bend; this is known as stress incontinence. Another kind of incontinence is urge incontinence which is when you have a desperate need to empty your bladder or bowel or fail to reach the toilet in time.

If you experience the sensation of something coming down the back or front passage, or a feeling of heaviness in either of these areas it may be a prolapse of one of the internal organs or tissues. This must be diagnosed by a doctor who will refer you to the appropriate specialist where treatment and exercises will be given.

Factors that cause damage to the pelvic floor muscles

- Frequent heavy lifting
- Lack of general fitness
- Being overweight
- Childbirth
  - Forceps
  - Episiotomy
- Long history of constipation
- Surgery in the pelvic region
- Chronic cough
- Menopausal changes

How do I exercise my pelvic floor muscles?

Lie, sit or stand with your knees slightly apart. Tighten up your back and front passage as though you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind or urinating. The feeling is one of a “squeeze and lift” closing and drawing up the front and back passages. This is called a pelvic floor contraction. It is easy to use the wrong muscles so make sure when you do these exercise that you;

- Keep your buttocks relaxed (gluteal muscles)
- Keep your legs relaxed and apart to avoid squeezing your thighs together
- Keep breathing naturally throughout

You can initially find these muscles by trying to interrupt the flow of urine – although DO NOT exercise your pelvic floor muscles in this way, only use this as an initial test to find them. Here are some other descriptions that can help you exercise these muscles correctly.

- Imagine pulling inwards and upwards
- Imagine pulling the pubic bone and coccyx together
- Think of an “Elevator” lifting up to different levels

It’s also important to do both fast and slow contractions because these muscles have both fast and slow twitch fibres.
Fast exercises

1. Quickly tighten up your pelvic floor muscles
2. Hold for one second and then relax fully
3. Repeat this until the muscle gets tired
4. Eventually aim for 10 repetitions

Slow exercises

1. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for up to 10 seconds
2. Relax fully for 4 seconds
3. Now repeat this pattern of contracting and holding followed by relaxing fully until the muscles get tired
4. Eventually aim for 10 repetitions

To strengthen these muscles effectively it is important to repeat the slow and fast exercises 3-6 times per day more if you have any incontinence issues.

Why bother?

Improving the strength of your pelvic floor muscles has many benefits including:

- Improves blood circulation and cell renewal to the pelvic area
- Helps to reduce incontinence problems (resolve or reduce any leakage issues)
- Improves sexual function in both men and women
- Helps to improve bladder and bowel control
- Prevent/manage a prolapsed organ
There is more to your core than the iconic six pack!

Listed below are just some of the muscles that make up your core:

**Inner unit: (deeper muscles)**
- Pelvic floor muscles
- Diaphragm
- Transverse abdominals
- Multifidus

**Outer unit: (superficial muscles)**
- Rectus abdominals (six pack)
- External obliques

A strong pelvic floor is vital within the role of your core muscles as you can see from the information above weakened pelvic floor muscles can be devastating.

**Our top tips**
- If you are having any problems associated with your pelvic floor muscles then seek specific advice (get your GP to refer you to a continence specialist or physiotherapist)
- Breathe naturally when doing your exercises
- Remember to relax the buttocks, abs and leg muscles
- Practice every day. Down time, at your desk, after you go to the toilet, watching TV, if you can’t sleep at night and any time you remember to do them
- Don’t give up. It’s a long process of improvement, be patient and have good will power as the results will be worth it