

Pelvic floor relaxation



An important stage in improving many symptoms is recognising when the pelvic floor muscles are tight, knowing how to enable them to release, and to acknowledge when they are relaxed.

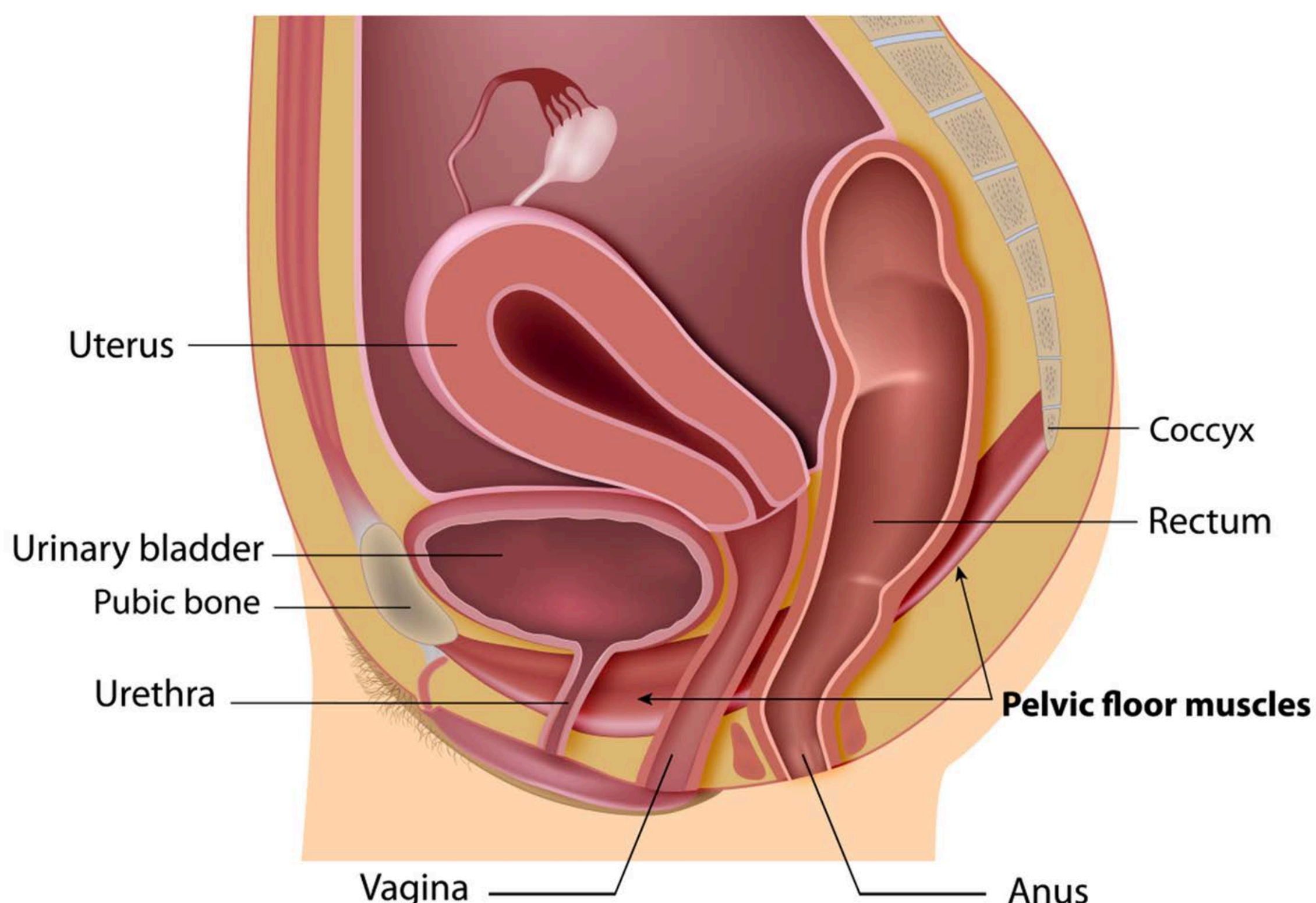
Like other muscle groups in the body, the pelvic floor muscle has a scale of activity. When we contract, or tighten the pelvic floor, it should lift and when we let go of the contraction the muscles should return to their resting position. When muscles are not able to let go, this can also lead to pain and further consequences which may affect the bladder or bowel:

Bladder - voiding difficulties such as slow or interrupted flow, difficulty initiating flow, incomplete emptying of the bladder and urgency (needing to get to the toilet quickly).

Bowel - constipation, difficulty getting started or not completely emptying.

By enabling the pelvic floor muscles to release, the bladder and bowel will then be able to function more effectively.

The pelvic floor muscles form a hammock underneath your pelvis to provide support and control for your bladder and bowel. The muscles attach to your pubic bone at the front, then span backwards to your coccyx (tailbone) and outwards to your sitting bones.



A pelvic floor contraction is performed by closing and drawing up your front and back passages. Imagine you are trying to stop wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine. It should be a sensation of 'tighten and lift'.

You should:

- Continue to breathe normally
- Keep your buttocks and legs relaxed though you may feel a gentle tightening of your tummy
- Always let the muscles fully relax at the end of a contraction

Getting to know how it feels to contract the muscles is an important step in knowing when they are working, as well as when they are relaxed. It is easiest to practise this in a sitting or lying position. When you understand how to contract and relax them, there are other exercises which can be useful to achieve relaxation.



Abdominal breathing

Abdominal breathing is one of the easiest relaxation techniques to learn. When we become stressed or feel pain, one of our body's fight or flight reactions is shallow, rapid breathing. Taking deep, slow breaths is one way we can turn off this fight or flight reaction. Breathing is the starting point for many other forms of relaxation exercise.

Adopt a comfortable position, either lying with your knees bent or reclined sitting. Place one hand on your lower tummy and the other on your breastbone. Gently breathe in and imagine the air filling your stomach so that your lower hand gently rises. Focus on breathing into your tummy so that your lower hand rises and falls, and your upper hand stays relatively still.

Imagine your whole body as a canister that you are filling with air. To allow as much air in as possible, your tummy must gently expand as your ribs widen. At the same time, focus on the pelvic floor and allow the muscles to become soft. As you breathe out these areas gently recoil back to guide the air back out.

These exercises can take real concentration so put some quiet time aside to practice. Once you are more confident, they can be performed in any position and will contribute to improved overall function of the pelvic muscles.



A video showing this in more detail is available on our website www.eoemskservice.nhs.uk/our-services/pelvic-health-physio/pelvic-health-resources under the pelvic pain condition heading.

Mindfulness and relaxation

Body scanning

This is a mindfulness exercises where you pay attention to the sensations in different parts of your body. You can do this lying down or in sitting. Scan through your whole body for any areas of increased muscles tension.

Stretch contract relaxation

This technique involves relaxing the muscles of the whole body, which can be progressive from head to toe.

You can listen to videos to guide you through these techniques, and others, using the following link: <https://www.eoemskservice.nhs.uk/advice-and-leaflets/chronic-pain/understanding-pain-class>

Using breathing to facilitate release

This combines the abdominal breathing techniques you have already learned with allowing the pelvic floor muscles to let go.

Contract the pelvic floor muscles and keep them working as you breathe in. As you breathe to the bottom of your abdomen notice how the pelvic floor muscles relax downwards a little.

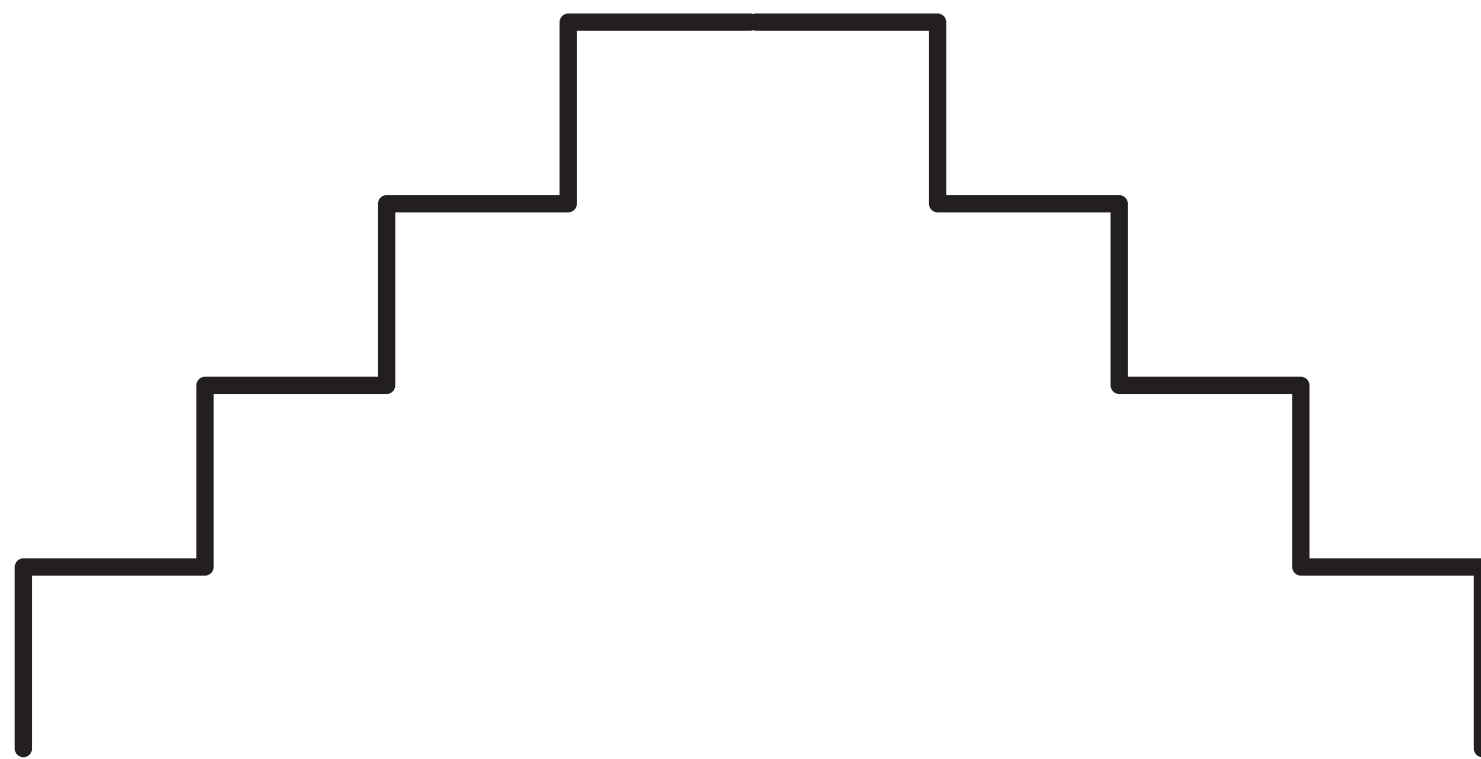
Lift and let go in stages

During this exercise, imagine the pelvic floor is a lift in a 3-storey building. Contract the pelvic floor muscles a little to lift to the first floor, pull in a little bit more to go to the second floor, squeeze a little more to go to the top. Continue to gently breathe throughout each hold.

Now slowly allow the muscles to release to go down to the second floor, release a little more to go to the first floor, let the muscle relax further back to the ground floor, and now let them fully release down to the basement.

Allow the pelvic floor muscles to soften, widen and lengthen – there is no need to push or bear down.

Let them soften, lengthen, and melt. This takes practice to achieve, and you may start with less stages and progress.



Squeezy App

The following app can be useful to help guide and track pelvic floor exercises.

<https://www.squeezyapp.com/what-if-i-have-pelvic-pain/>

Exercises

The following exercises can assist with pelvic floor relaxation. Aim to hold each position for 30-60 seconds, repeat 2-3 times. To start with you may benefit from completing these exercises little and often to promote pelvic floor relaxation. Overtime you may add these into your normal exercise/stretching/yoga routines.



Happy baby: lie on your back with your knees bent into your chest. As you inhale, take hold of the inside or outside of your feet. Open your knees wider than your trunk and bring them towards the floor next to your armpits. Place your ankles directly over your knees. Flex through your heels, gently pushing your feet into your hands, pulling the hands down to create resistance. Extend your spine by lengthening your tailbone and draw in your belly button slightly. Hold for 30-60 seconds.



Childs pose: start on your hands and knees, gently push your bottom back towards your heels. Let your arms slide along the floor as far as possible. Push your bottom back and down and your chest towards the floor. Continued relaxed breathing throughout.



Deep squat: stand in a hip-width or wider position. Squat down as low as you can.



Butterfly: lying down with the soles of your feet facing each other. Let your knees fall to the side. You can support under the thighs with cushions if the stretch is too strong.



V: lie on your back with your bottom as close as possible to the wall, rest your legs in a V shape up the wall.