

Exercice Program

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Introduction

BLADDER CONTROL PROBLEMS SUCH AS A PRESSING URGE TO URINATE (A FALSE NEED TO URINATE), FREQUENT URINATION AND URINARY LEAKAGES ARE NOT PART OF THE NORMAL AGING PROCESS.

This exercise program will help you to eliminate or at least reduce urinary leakages and to control urinary urges and reduce trips to the washroom.

This program is to be undertaken independently, at home, as a supplement to the 12 sessions with the pelvic floor rehabilitation physiotherapist.

These exercises and techniques require both patience and motivation if you are to do them correctly and regularly. They have been proven to be highly effective in populations of women 60 or over. Why not for you?

BE PERSEVERANT!

We believe you have what it takes to complete this exercise program right to the end.
Good luck!

This brochure provides :

1 An exercise program for pelvic floor re-education

This program includes instructions for exercises aimed at strengthening your pelvic floor muscles. By strengthening these muscles, you will improve your ability to retain urine, to avoid urinary leakages and to reach the washroom in time. The exercises will increase in difficulty every four weeks.

2 An advancepelvic floor exercise program that will permit you to maintain and improve on the initial results.

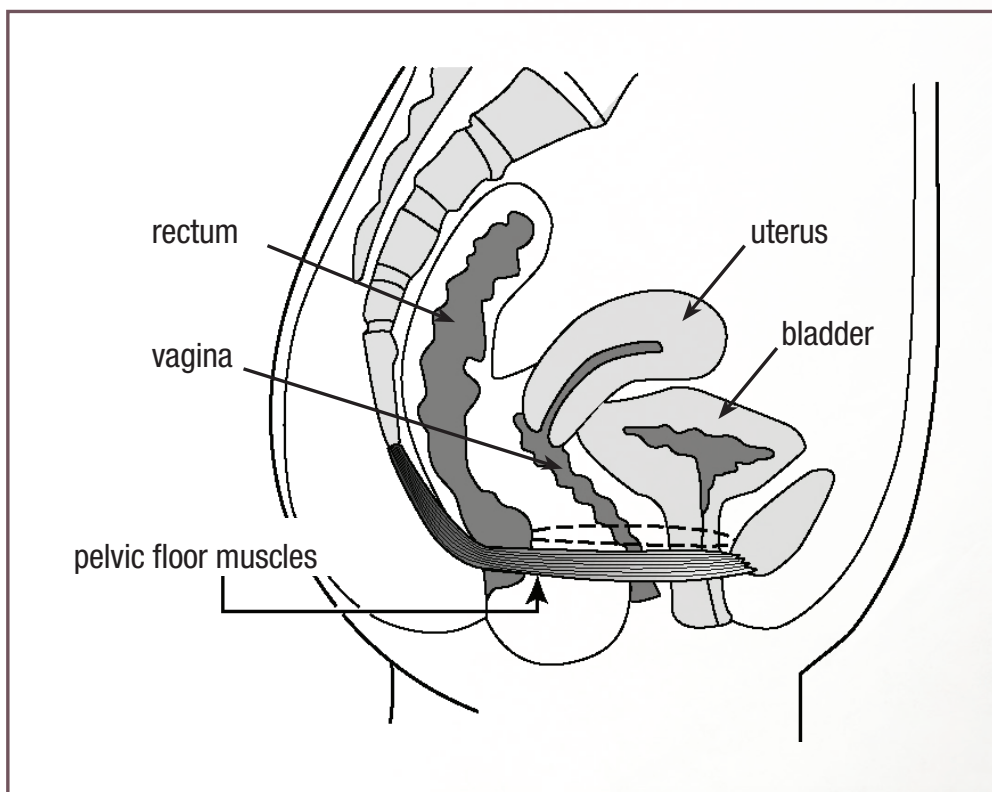


Photo: Health Canada/Santé Canada

In General

1 Where exactly are the pelvic floor muscles ?

The pelvic floor muscles are comprised of three layers of muscle that close the base of the pelvis. Stretched like a hammock between the pubis and the coccyx, they play a key role in controlling urine, gas and stool. They also provide support to the uterus and the bladder and play an essential part in achieving orgasm as well.



A strong pelvic floor helps to :

- support the bladder, uterus and rectum
- compress the urethra and the anal canal, thereby preventing leakage of urine, gas and stool

2 Identifying the pelvic floor muscles during a contraction



Sitting comfortably on a chair with the muscles of your buttocks, thighs and abdomen relaxed, tighten (contract) your pelvic floor muscles as if to retain urine and gas. If you have contracted the pelvic floor muscles properly, you should feel them being drawn inwards. This indicates that your pelvic floor contraction was effective. However, if you feel the muscles press against the chair, then you are pushing your pelvic floor muscles outwards (as if passing stool) rather than contracting them.

Warning! It is important to understand how to do a pelvic floor movement correctly before repeating it. Pushing outwards could weaken the pelvic floor muscles even further.

If you cannot feel the contraction, do not worry! Even women with very weak pelvic floor muscles can benefit from pelvic floor exercises.

To ensure you are contracting the right muscles, place a finger in your vagina and contract your pelvic floor. If you feel your finger being drawn inwards, the pelvic floor contraction is effective. If your finger is expelled during the contraction, you are pushing the pelvic floor muscles outwards (like a bowel movement) rather than contracting them.

If you are still unable to contract your pelvic floor muscles, ask your physiotherapist to teach you how.

Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercise Program



Weeks 1 to 4

The following four exercises should be done daily for four weeks. They may be difficult at first but will get easier with time and practice.

To ensure you do the exercises on a daily basis, designate a moment in the day when you will have a free **20-minute** period. Make it a **daily habit**. Do not engage in any other activity during the exercises (such as watching television, reading, etc.). Each day, after completing the exercises, check off the appropriate box in the exercise calendar (see page 15).

Remember, how well you do these exercises is very important ! A few good contractions are more beneficial than multiple repetitions done badly. Good results are achieved only with time and effort.

IN A SUPINE POSITION :

Lie on your back with your knees bent upwards, your feet slightly apart and your arms by your sides.





EXERCISE 1 : MUSCLE STRENGTH



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- Contract (squeeze) your pelvic floor muscles as hard as possible, as if to retain urine and gas, and draw your pelvic floor inwards.
- Hold the contraction for 6 seconds. Slowly count to 6 out loud. Breathe while counting, but try not to release the contraction.
- Relax the pelvic floor for 12 seconds.
- Do three series of 6 contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 18 contractions. Take a one-minute rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs as much as possible.

Do your best. If you cannot feel the muscles tightening, stop and try the exercises again later on.



EXERCISE 2 : COORDINATION



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can.
- Hold the contraction for one second then cough hard while maintaining the pelvic floor muscle contraction.
- Relax for 2 seconds then repeat the contraction-cough-relaxation exercises twice more.
- Rest for 30 seconds.
- Do two more series of the above.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 3 : RAPID CONTRACTIONS



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can, as if to retain urine and gas.
- Hold the contraction for one second.
- Ensure you relax your pelvic floor for one second.
- Do three series of 6 rapid contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 18 rapid contractions. Take a 12 -second rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 4 : ENDURANCE



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles gently; hold for 6 seconds.
- Now, without releasing the initial contraction, contract the muscles as hard as you can for 6 seconds.
- Return to the “gentle” contraction for 6 seconds.
- Then completely relax the contraction and rest for 18 seconds.
- Remember, do not hold your breath during the exercise.
- Repeat this gentle-strong-gentle exercises two more times.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.

Don't get discouraged !

You should start to see results in four to six weeks.

Integrate the pelvic floor exercises into your daily activities! Always tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze, lift a heavy object, lean over, get up from a chair or do any other activity that causes urinary leakage.



Exercise and Urinary Leakage Calendar

At the end of each day, check off the exercises you completed and indicate the total number of urinary leakages you had during the day.

WEEK 1

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 2

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 3

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 4

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

You are now ready to move on to the next stage. This involves strengthening the pelvic floor in a sitting position while holding the muscle contractions for longer periods of time (to increase your endurance).



Weeks 5 to 8

These four exercises should be done **daily for four weeks**. They may be difficult at first but will become easier with time and practice.

To help you stick to a daily program, select a time of the day when you will have **25 minutes** to complete the exercises. Make it a **daily habit**. Do not engage in any other activity while exercising (such as watching television, reading, etc.). Each day, after completing the exercises, check off the appropriate box on the exercise calendar (see page 21).

Remember, how you do the exercises is very important ! A few good contractions are better than multiple repetitions done badly. It takes time and effort to achieve good results.

IN A SITTING POSITION :

These exercises are done sitting down. For maximum comfort, find a chair that you like, one that offers good back support and allows your feet to touch the ground.





EXERCISE 1 : MUSCLE STRENGTH



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as possible, as if to retain urine and gas, and draw your pelvic floor inwards.
- Hold the contraction for 8 seconds. Slowly count to 8 out loud. Breathe while counting, but try not to release the contraction.
- Relax the pelvic floor for 16 seconds.
- Do three series of 8 contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 24 contractions. Take a one-minute rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 2 : COORDINATION



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can.
- Hold the contraction for one second then cough hard 2 times while maintaining the pelvic floor muscle contraction. Ensure you maintain the contraction between the two coughs.
- Relax for 2 seconds then repeat the contraction-coughs-relaxation exercises twice more.
- Rest for 30 seconds.
- Do two more series of the above.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 3 : RAPID CONTRACTIONS

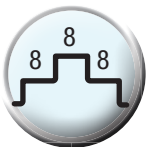


- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can, as if to retain urine and gas.
- Hold the contraction for one second.
- Ensure you relax your pelvic floor for one second.
- Do three series of 8 rapid contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 24 rapid contractions. Take a 16 second rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 4 : ENDURANCE



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles gently; hold for 8 seconds.
- Now, without releasing the initial contraction, contract the muscles as hard as you can for 8 seconds.
- Return to the “gentle” contraction for 8 seconds.
- Then completely relax the contraction and rest for 24 seconds.
- Remember; do not hold your breath during the exercise.
- Repeat this gentle-strong-gentle exercises two more times.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.

STICK TO IT !

The exercises need to be done daily and to the best of your ability to achieve the best results.

Remember to incorporate the pelvic floor exercises into your daily activities. Always contract your pelvic floor muscles before you cough, sneeze, lift a heavy object, lean over, get up from a chair or do any other activity that can cause urinary leakages.



Exercise and Urinary Leakage Calendar

At the end of each day, check off the exercises you completed and indicate the total number of urinary leakages you had during the day.

WEEK 5

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 6


	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 7

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 8

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair tied back, smiling as she drinks from a blue plastic water bottle with a black lid. The background is a solid light blue color.

YOU ARE NOW READY TO MOVE TO THE NEXT STAGE. THIS INVOLVES STRENGTHENING THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES IN A STANDING POSITION AND HOLDING THE MUSCLE CONTRACTIONS FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME (TO INCREASE ENDURANCE). MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE URINARY LEAKAGES WHILE STANDING OR WALKING SO IT IS IMPORTANT TO WORK THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES IN THIS POSITION.

Weeks 9 to 12

These four exercises should be done **daily for four weeks**. They may be difficult at first but will become easier with time and practice.

To help you stick to a daily program, select a time of the day when you will have **30 minutes** to complete all the exercises. Make it a **daily habit**. Do not engage in any other activity while exercising (such as watching television, reading, etc.). Each day, after completing the exercises, check off the appropriate box on the exercise calendar (see page 27).

Remember, how you do the exercises is very important! A few good contractions are better than multiple repetitions done badly. It takes time and effort to achieve good results.

IN A STANDING POSITION :

These exercises are done in a standing position. Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time or if you have a tendency to lose your balance, stand behind or beside a chair and rest your hands on the back of the chair for support.





EXERCISE 1 : MUSCLE STRENGTH



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as possible, as if to retain urine and gas, and draw your pelvic floor inwards.
- Hold the contraction for 10 seconds. Slowly count to 10 out loud. Breathe while counting, but try not to release the contraction.
- Relax for 20 seconds.
- Do three series of 10 contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 30 contractions. Take a one-minute rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 2 : COORDINATION



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can.
- Hold the contraction for one second then cough hard 3 times while maintaining the pelvic floor muscle contraction. Ensure you maintain the contraction between the 3 coughs.
- Relax for 2 seconds then repeat the contraction-coughs-relaxation exercises twice more.
- Rest for 30 seconds.
- Do two more series of the above.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 3 : RAPID CONTRACTIONS

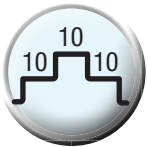


- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can, as if to retain urine and gas.
- Hold the contraction for one second.
- Ensure you relax your pelvic floor for one second.
- Do three series of 10 rapid contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 30 rapid contractions. Take a 20 second rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 4 : ENDURANCE



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles gently; hold for 10 seconds.
- Now, without releasing the initial contraction, contract the muscles as hard as you can for 10 seconds.
- Return to the “gentle” contraction for 10 seconds.
- Then completely relax the contraction and rest for 30 seconds.
- Remember; do not hold your breath during the exercise.
- Repeat this gentle-strong-gentle exercises two more times.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.

HANG IN THERE! YOU HAVE ALMOST COMPLETED THE PROGRAM !

You will have better results if you do the exercises correctly and daily.

Remember to incorporate the pelvic floor exercises into your daily activities. Always squeeze your muscles before you cough, sneeze, lift a heavy object, lean over, get up from a chair or do any other activity that causes urinary leakage.

Exercise and Urinary Leakage Calendar

At the end of each day, check off the exercises you completed and indicate the total number of urinary leakages you had during the day.

WEEK 9

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 10

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 11

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								

WEEK 12

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Total
Exercise 1								
Exercise 2								
Exercise 3								
Exercise 4								
# of urinary leakages								



Congratulations!

You made it to the end of the 12-week program.

Now that you have mastered the pelvic floor exercises, you should continue to do them regularly - 3 times per week - to maintain the effect! If you continue to practice the exercises extensively, five times a week, you may even see a further reduction in urinary leakages a year after having started the pelvic floor exercises.

To help maintain good exercise habits and continue with the program, this next section provides **more advanced exercises**.

THE FORWARD LUNGE POSITION:

The exercises in this section are done in the forward lunge position. Stand with one leg in front of the other. This position simulates walking. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time or if you have a tendency to lose your balance, stand behind or beside a chair and rest your hands on the back of the chair for support.





EXERCISE 1 : MUSCLE STRENGTH



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- Contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as possible, as if to retain urine and gas, and draw your pelvic floor inwards.
- Hold the contraction for 12 seconds. Slowly count to 12 out loud. Breathe while counting, but try not to release the contraction.
- Relax for 12 seconds.
- Do this exercise 12 times: one series includes 12 contractions and relaxations. Take a one-minute rest and repeat the series 2 times.
- Each day, you should do a total of 36 contractions of 12 seconds.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 2 : COORDINATION



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can.
- Hold the contraction for one second then cough hard 3 times while maintaining the pelvic floor muscle contraction. Ensure you maintain the contraction between each cough.
- Relax for 2 seconds then repeat the contraction-coughs-relaxation exercises twice more.
- Rest for 30 seconds.
- Do two more series of the above.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 3 : RAPID CONTRACTIONS



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then contract your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can, as if to retain urine and gas.
- Hold the contraction for one second.
- Ensure you relax your pelvic floor for one second.
- Do 3 series of 12 rapid contraction-relaxation exercises for a total of 36 rapid contractions. Take a 24 second rest between each series.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.



EXERCISE 4 : ENDURANCE



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth then do a strong pelvic floor muscle contraction; hold for 12 seconds.
- Now, without releasing the initial contraction, shift to a gentle contraction for 12 seconds.
- Return to the strong contraction for 12 seconds.
- Then completely relax the contraction and rest for 36 seconds.
- Remember; do not hold your breath during the exercise.
- Repeat this strong-gentle-strong exercises two more times.

If possible, relax all your muscles, especially those in the buttocks and inner thighs.

Do not forget to incorporate these pelvic floor exercises into your daily activities. Always squeeze the muscles before coughing, sneezing, lifting a heavy object, leaning over, getting up from a chair or any other activity that causes a urine leakage.

Don't forget !

- Be aware of situations that weaken the pelvic floor :
 - » chronic coughing or sneezing
 - » constipation
 - » obesity
 - » physical effort that increases abdominal pressure
- Consult your doctor if you have any allergies, bronchitis or other respiratory conditions that make you cough or sneeze a lot.
- Avoid constipation by drinking six to eight glasses of water a day, increasing the amount of fiber in your diet (eat fruits and vegetables every day) and walking regularly (refer to the education sheet on Chronic Constipation provided by the physiotherapist in Session #6).
- Don't force or exert yourself during a bowel movement. Wait until you need to have a bowel movement and sit in the right position; that is, leaning forwards slightly with your feet flat on the floor. If stool expulsion is not spontaneous, tighten your abdomen and blow into a fist. Do not hold your breath while pushing as this creates too much pressure on the pelvic floor. If you do not manage to evacuate quickly, do not try and force it. It is better to wait until you feel the need to defecate return – later on.

- Walking or an abdominal massage* after a meal can stimulate intestinal activity.

* Lying on your back, make circular movements on your abdomen with the palm of your hand while applying a light pressure. Start on your right-hand side; using the circular movements throughout move in an upwards direction, then work your way across to the left-hand-side and continue downwards on the left-hand side. Do the massage five times after meals (refer to the education sheet on Chronic Constipation provided by the physiotherapist in Session # 6).

- Maintain a healthy weight; that is, the weight suggested for your height and age.



- Avoid lifting heavy loads or, when unavoidable, contract your pelvic floor before and during lifting.

The exercise program presented in this brochure was developed as part of a study entitled Improving continence care in older women: linking anatomy to rehabilitative interventions and improved as part of the study entitled Comparing Two physiotherapy treatments (rehabilitation of the pelvic floor muscles) for urinary incontinence in women aged 60 and over.

The program, designed for independent home use, is intended as an accompaniment to the 12 physiotherapy sessions led by a pelvic floor rehabilitation physiotherapist.

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Your comments
are welcome

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