

## **PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES**

The exercises described on this instruction sheet are the cornerstone of first-line management of incontinence. They are useful in stress incontinence for pelvic muscle rehabilitation, and in urgency incontinence for urge suppression and bladder retraining.

# PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES

(also called Kegel exercises or pelvic floor muscle exercises)

## How should you do pelvic muscle exercises?

- Imagine trying to stop yourself from passing gas. Try it now. When you do this you should feel that you are tightening the muscle around the anus, without moving buttocks, thighs or abdomen.
- Hold this muscle tensed for about 3-5 seconds and then relax it again for the same time. Do this 10 times.
- During the first week, repeat this series of 10 contractions 3 times each day. This will take you about 5 minutes each time.
- In the following weeks, gradually increase to: holding for 10 seconds, relaxing for 10 seconds, and repeating the series of 10 contractions 4 times each day. This will take you about 20 minutes each day.
- You will need to do the exercises daily for several weeks before you notice any improvement

Who needs to do pelvic muscle exercises?

- Anyone with mild bladder control problems may find that pelvic muscle exercises help enough to avoid the need for other treatment.

What are the pelvic muscles?

- The pelvic muscles form a hammock from the tailbone at the back to the pubic bone at the front. The hammock supports the bladder and the bowel, and in women the uterus. It also helps to prevent urine leakage by keeping the bladder outlet closed.

How do pelvic muscles become weakened?

- They can become weakened or stretched because of:
  - lack of exercise
  - long-term straining to pass stool (constipation)
  - in women: childbirth or hormone changes after menopause
  - in men: occasionally after prostate surgery

How can pelvic muscle exercises help bladder control?

- Exercises strengthen the muscles that keep the outlet closed
- You can learn “The Knack”. This involves being aware of these muscles and controlling them consciously. Then you can tighten them more when there is an extra chance of leakage, such as just before you cough, laugh, sneeze or lift something heavy.

If you are worried about how to do your pelvic muscle exercises, or if they have not made any difference to your bladder control problem after 6 weeks, please contact your health professional.