



pelvic flaws

A weakened pelvic floor can put a serious dampener (literally) on many activities. If you are pregnant, have recently had a baby or, in fact, if you have ever had a baby, you are more at risk of pelvic floor problems.

The pelvic floor is referred to as the 'core', and as a woman, it is central to your body's wellbeing. It is basically a platform of muscles that supports and controls your bladder, bowel and uterus. They also help support your spine, and they play an important role in sexual sensation and function.

common signs of pelvic floor problems:

- accidentally leaking urine when exercising, playing sport, laughing, coughing or sneezing
- frequently needing to go to the toilet
- not making it to the toilet in time
- accidentally passing wind
- painful sex or poor sensation or leaking during sex.
- a prolapse which may be felt as a bulge in the vagina, or a feeling of heaviness, discomfort, pulling or dropping.

what to do

Low impact exercises such as walking, swimming, low intensity water aerobics, pilates and yoga help promote core strength but you will need to do specific pelvic floor training as well.

once you've identified your pelvic floor muscles, you should do the following:

- Aim to lift your muscles quickly and strongly
- Hold from 1-10 seconds, then relax the muscles completely
- Rest in between each lift from 3-5 seconds
- Repeat 8-12 times (this is one set)
- Do three sets per day

a smart option

SmartBalls have been designed to tone your pelvic floor muscles as you go about your daily activities. They are weighted balls, made from

medical grade materials and are worn vaginally (with a little lubricant) as you go about your daily activities. Regular use of SmartBalls can strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, and correct and prevent bladder weakness.

what not to do

Some exercises place more stress on the pelvic floor than others. High impact and cardio exercises such as running, jumping, star jumps, skipping, and sports such as tennis, netball, hockey, touch rugby can all place downward pressure on the pelvic floor and will weaken rather than strengthen the muscles. There are some safe resistance exercises that can be done at the gym (such as dumbbell exercises on a Swiss ball, seated exercises such as shoulder press, rows, bicep curls), but be careful to avoid any heaving lifting or straining. Also avoid abdominal exercises such as crunches, sit ups and curl ups. Exercises such as these can worsen existing problems.

If, after 3-6 months, you are still having problems, you should seek help from a women's health physiotherapist or continence advisor who can design an individual training programme for you.

Useful websites: www.continence.org.nz and www.pelvicfloor.co.nz

For further information or advice, phone the Continence Helpline in confidence: 0800 650 659 (9am – 4pm)