

## **Pelvic floor exercises in pregnancy**

This handout outlines exercises that can be practiced throughout your life. These simple techniques improve the tone and general health of these muscles. They can also help improve bladder control and improve your sex life postnatally! Pregnancy is a great time to develop an awareness of the pelvic floor muscles and strengthen them. Now is a good time to get into the habit of doing them – sitting on the bus, waiting in a queue.... in fact, most places.

The pelvic floor is made of a network of muscles that is perforated by three openings in women: the urinal tract, the vagina and the anal sphincter. The proper functioning of these muscles allow us control over when we urinate and defecate. We usually take them for granted and it might be difficult to isolate these muscles at the beginning. The functioning of these muscles will be challenged by the physical stress of childbirth, hormonal changes during the menopause and infection of the urinary tract or cervix. Practising the following exercises will help enormously postnatally, and in particular with stress incontinence (but please always seek medical advice too – the sooner the better!).

**Sit in a comfortable position** (sitting upright on a chair or cross-legged with support).

**1) As you breathe in, activate the pelvic floor muscles.** (The muscles are drawn upwards as if you were 'holding on' to go to the toilet or pulling the zip up on a tight pair of jeans.)

**As you breathe out, relax the muscles. Repeat process 5 times.**

**2) As you breathe in, activate muscles to halfway, pause, and then to maximum activation. Repeat 5 times.**

These exercises can also be practised in standing postures. Try sliding your back down the wall so the knees are slightly bent. Check your toes and knees are pointing in the same direction.

Lying on your back, with your knees bent, is another excellent way to engage these muscles. From about 30 weeks of pregnancy, lie on your left side or have lots of pillows behind your back to prop you up in a semi-sitting position.