

PELVIC FLOOR & ABDOMINAL “CORE” MUSCLES

Pelvic floor muscles are the “hidden” internal muscles that support the bladder, uterus, and bowel. If the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles are not functioning optimally this may result in problems such as incontinence, difficulty emptying the bladder or bowel, sexual difficulties and/or pelvic pain.

The pelvic floor muscles can be hard to identify inside the body, and up to 40% of women perform pelvic floor exercises incorrectly, which can be making their problem worse. The pelvic floor muscles form the base of your “core” and work alongside your lower abdominal muscles (Transversus Abdominis) to support the spine and control changes in abdominal pressure.

Pelvic floor exercises are very specific exercises which work three muscles simultaneously:

- The pelvic floor muscles which pull the urethra upwards and forwards
- The innermost abdominal corset that draws in towards the backbone
- The deep lower back muscles which support the spine

This group of muscles regulates the pressure inside the abdomen during everyday tasks such as coughing, lifting and during exercise. However, if any of the muscles within the “core” are not working optimally, then this regulation system becomes imbalanced and the pelvic floor muscles can be overloaded and weakened.

Situations that cause these muscles to become weakened:

- Pregnancy and birth (vaginal and caesarean section)
- Gynaecological surgery • Constipation and straining to use the bowels
- Recurrent coughing
- Being overweight / obese
- General exercise performance, i.e high impact exercise or incorrect “core bracing” • Injury or trauma to the pelvis
- Long periods of being unwell (respiratory or gastrointestinal conditions)
- Incorrect postural tension such as hunching over or bracing your abdomen

You will benefit from doing correct pelvic floor and abdominal exercises if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Bladder or bowel incontinence or urgency
- Bladder, bowel or uterine prolapse
- Pelvic and vulval pain, pain with intercourse, pain post-natally
- Pregnancy and post-natal weakness of the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles

One of our Pelvic Health Physiotherapists can assess the pelvic floor muscles and abdominal muscles by using real time ultrasound or direct assessment to teach you how to do pelvic floor and abdominal muscle exercises correctly and provide appropriate exercises to facilitate your recovery.

Additional Resources

The pelvic pain foundation is a not-for-profit that helps to improve the quality of life of people with pelvic pain. Find out more here: <https://www.pelvicpain.org.au/>

