



## Your Pelvic Floor

*Comprehensive, practical information about the pelvic floor  
for a better understanding of its role and importance.*

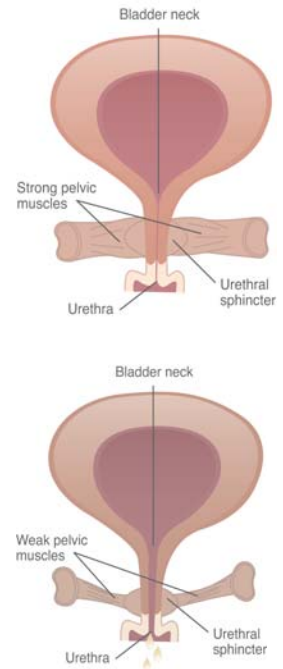
### Anatomy

The pelvic floor (also called the perineum) is made up of a group of muscles, ligaments and tissues that support the main organs of the lower abdomen (bladder, uterus, intestine) and control urine, gas and stool. For your abdominal organs to function normally, your pelvic floor musculature must be strong and healthy. That is why it is important for women to maintain good internal muscle tone throughout their lives, and why all clinical practice guides recommend strengthening of the pelvic floor muscles as a preferred treatment for urinary incontinence in women.

### Weakening of the Pelvic Floor

Lost muscle and tissue tone, and reduced elasticity of the ligaments that support the pelvic organs, results in a weakening of the pelvic floor and prevents the pelvic canals (urethra, vagina and anal canals) from functioning properly. If nothing is done to correct this weakening, a variety of problems can arise, including:

- **Urinary stress incontinence**, defined as accidental leakage of varying amounts of urine caused by various types of pressure on the abdomen, such as laughing, coughing, sneezing or simple motion. This leaking occurs without any sensation of a need to urinate. In other words, you aren't expecting it and it always happens at a bad time! This is the most common type of urinary incontinence (more than 50% of cases).
- **Organ descent (prolapse)**; i.e. descent of the uterus, bladder or rectum. Surgery may be required.
- **Reduced sexual sensitivity**. In women, loss of tone in the pelvic floor may be a source of difficulty experiencing complete sexual pleasure and achieving orgasm.



### Causes of Pelvic Floor Weakening

Pregnancy and delivery are the primary causes of weakness in the pelvic floor. During pregnancy, increased abdominal weight stretches the pelvic floor and may weaken it. It is most stretched during vaginal delivery. Damage to the pelvic floor is even greater in the event of an episiotomy, if the baby has a high birth weight or large head circumference, or if the mother has gained a lot of weight during pregnancy or had a multiple pregnancy. Women who had a cesarean delivery may also have a weakened pelvic floor.

**After a delivery** (vaginal or cesarean), it is a good idea to have your pelvic floor assessed by your physician before starting any exercise program (e.g. jumping, lifting weights). Certain activities can cause an increase in abdominal pressure and weaken the pelvic floor.

**Hormonal changes** resulting from menopause and aging can reduce the flexibility of the pelvic floor and weaken it.

Other predisposing factors can be responsible for weakening the pelvic floor muscles:

- Some women may have had a weakened pelvic floor since birth and therefore have a higher risk of developing urinary incontinence.
- Some habits (holding urine for a long time, wearing tight clothing), high-impact sports (jumping, running), obesity, chronic coughing (pulmonary disease, smoking), frequent constipation and weight lifting can weaken the pelvic floor.
- Hysterectomy and neurological disorders are other possible causes.

### Preserve your Pelvic Muscle Tone

Preserving your pelvic muscle tone is as important as remaining in good physical shape. Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles, whether by doing [Kegel exercises](#) or by using [vaginal cones](#), can be done at home. You can have the condition of your pelvic floor assessed by a healthcare professional, who will recommend the best method for you.

Make it happen ... defeat urinary stress incontinence

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