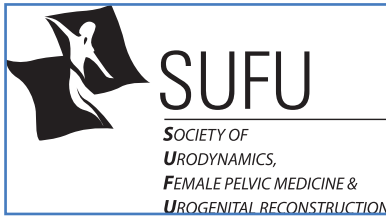


# CHANGES YOU CAN MAKE TO IMPROVE BLADDER PROBLEMS



The SUFU Foundation OAB Clinical Care Path Way

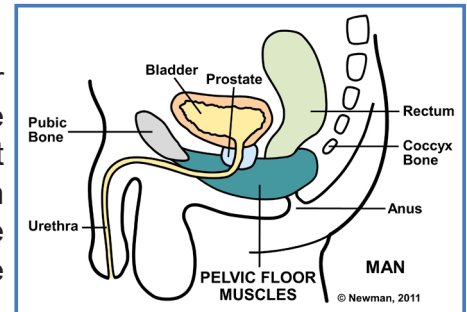
For more information on better bladder control visit:

<http://sufuorg.com/oab>

## GUIDE TO PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE TRAINING

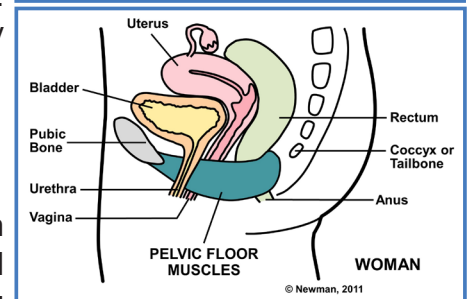
### Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

Your **pelvic floor muscles** are a group of muscles that support your bladder and help control the bladder opening. They attach to your pelvic bone and go around the rectum. These muscles form a sling or hammock that supports your pelvic organs (bladder, rectum, in women the uterus, in men the prostate). If the muscles weaken, the organs they support may change position. When this happens, you may have problems with urine leakage and other signs of overactive bladder (OAB) like urgency and frequency. That's why it's important to keep these muscles strong so they can properly support your pelvic organs. You can do this by exercising them regularly.



### Finding Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

To begin these exercises, you first have to make sure that you know which muscles to contract. To do this, think of the muscles you would use to control the passing of gas or to hold back a bowel movement. Now, without using the muscles of your legs, buttocks, or stomach, tighten or squeeze the ring of muscles around your rectum as you would in those situations. These are your pelvic floor muscles.



When you squeeze these muscles, you should feel a tightening or pulling in of your anus. Men may also see or feel their penis move and women may feel their vagina tightening or pulling up. During exercises, think about drawing your pelvic floor “up and inward”.

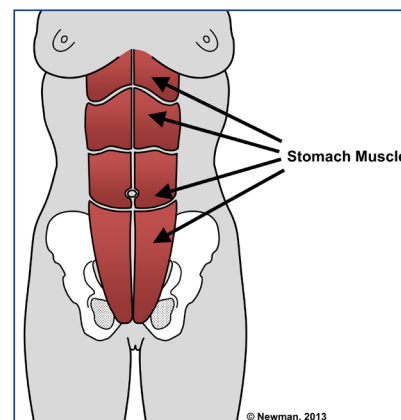
### Types of Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

There are 2 types of exercises that can help you strengthen your pelvic floor muscles:

- **Short** (or quick) muscle contractions (2 seconds). Tighten your pelvic floor muscles quickly and hard. Then immediately relax them.
- **Long** (or slow) muscle contractions (3–10seconds). Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold them for 3 or more seconds (as prescribed by your doctor). Then completely relax your muscle for the same amount of time.

### Tips For Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

1. When you exercise, make sure you tighten and relax your muscles for the same amount of time. So for short contractions, squeeze for 2 seconds and relax for 2 seconds. As an example of long contractions, squeeze for 5 seconds and relax for 5 seconds. Talk to your doctor or nurse about the amount of time that's right for you.
2. Do this 15 times in a row, 3 times a day. For example, do 15 contractions before breakfast, 15 contractions after lunch, and 15 contractions after dinner.
3. Remember to breathe during the exercises. Holding your breath can raise your blood pressure. If you have a hard time breathing, count out loud while you contract your muscles. This will force you to breathe while you exercise.
4. Don't "bear down" or push down when you exercise. This will put strain on your pelvic floor. Instead, think about drawing your pelvic floor muscle up.
5. Completely relax your muscles between each contraction. Make sure they stay relaxed for the entire time prescribed by your doctor or nurse. This allows blood and oxygen to flow to the muscle. Proper relaxation will prevent your muscles from getting too tired.
6. Improving pelvic floor muscle strength takes time. It may even take a few months to see changes. At first, you may not be able to contract and relax your pelvic muscles correctly or 15 times in a row. But don't worry. It'll get easier as you practice.
7. In addition to starting pelvic floor exercises, consider talking to your doctor or nurse about your treatment goals and expectations.



### Watch Out For These Common Mistakes

- ✓ DO NOT tighten your hip, leg, buttock, and stomach muscles when you squeeze the pelvic floor muscles. If your legs move, buttocks lift or tense up, or stomach muscle becomes tense, then you're using these muscles. Not sure if your stomach is tense? Simply put your hand on your stomach when you do the exercises. If you feel your stomach muscle tighten, then you know you are using this muscle.
- ✓ DO NOT hold your breath. Breathe normally or count out loud, or both.

## USING YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Now that you know how to find and exercise your pelvic floor muscles, you can use them to control your bladder when you have a strong need to urinate. Contracting your pelvic floor muscles quickly and strongly can relax your bladder and help the urge to urinate go away. When you feel an urge to go, **don't rush to the bathroom**. This can actually make matters worse. Instead:

- Stop and stay still. Sit down if you can.
- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly (3–5 times).  
Keep trying until the feeling of urgency gets smaller or you have it under control.
- Relax the rest of your body. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on stopping the urge.
- Wait until the urge is smaller or has gone away. Then walk to the bathroom at a normal pace.

You can also use your pelvic floor muscles to prevent bladder leaks when you cough or sneeze. It is a skill called the stress strategy or “the Knack” because it will give you a “Knack” for stopping bladder leaks. Think of any activities that have caused you to leak urine in the past: Coughing? Sneezing? Lifting? Bending? Getting up from a chair?

To prevent urine loss during these times:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as fast and as hard as you can just **before** and **during** these activities. This will help to brace your pelvic floor for what's coming and protect it.
- If you forget to tighten your muscles and urine leaks out, go ahead and start squeezing your muscles anyway. It won't prevent a bladder leak that time, but it will help you to build the habit of using your muscles to prevent future leaks.

This skill takes concentration at first. But don't get discouraged. Keep practicing and eventually it will become automatic. Always remember: "Squeeze before you sneeze."