

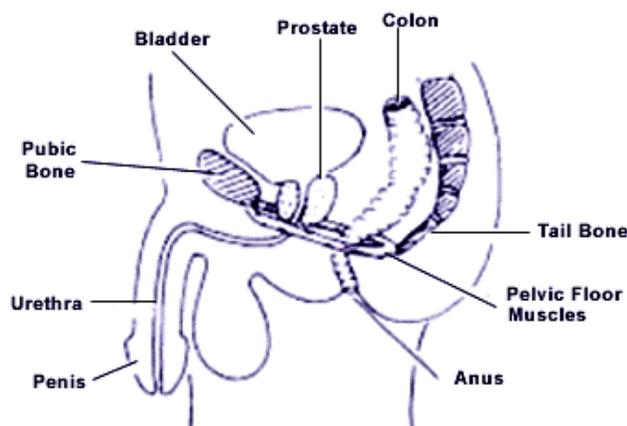
Continence management following prostate surgery

Bladder weakness, or urinary incontinence, is experienced by many men following surgery for prostate cancer. This is a common problem, however many men find this the biggest challenge they have to cope with during the recovery process.

Most men regain their bladder control over time and continue to improve for up to one year following surgery. This leaflet will provide you with helpful ways to improve and manage your incontinence following prostate surgery.

What is incontinence?

Incontinence refers to the accidental leaking of urine and can occur after prostate surgery.



Why does it happen?

- The prostate gland is about the size of a walnut and sits at the base of the bladder.
- Surgery to remove the prostate gland (radical prostatectomy) affects the muscle at the top of the prostate, (the internal bladder sphincter) that controls continence.

- The external bladder sphincter is another sphincter that controls continence and is part of the set of muscles below the prostate called the pelvic floor. These muscles are also involved in bladder control.
- If the bladder sphincters are damaged during prostate cancer surgery, the pelvic floor muscles are relied on more often to control the bladder.
- If the pelvic floor muscles are weak urinary incontinence may happen.

What are the symptoms?

- Urinary incontinence usually occurs when you undertake activities that increase the pressure inside the abdomen, and push down on the bladder.
- If the pelvic floor muscles (attached to external sphincter) are weak or not working well, urine will leak out.

This is known as 'stress incontinence'.

Typical activities that can cause leakage are:

- Coughing.
- Sneezing.
- Laughing.
- Lifting, pushing, pulling.
- Walking.
- Moving from lying to sitting or sitting to standing positions.

How can the problem be treated?

There are a number of ways to help with the problem

- **Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises**
These exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, so that they can give the bladder and rectum (lower bowel) support. This will improve your bladder or bowel control and improve or stop any leaking.

What are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles provide a 'hammock' or 'sling' at the base of the pelvis that supports the bladder, and rectum and helps to keep the openings of the bladder and back passage closed.

What weakens the Pelvic Floor Muscles and causes stress incontinence?

Surgery

Males who had surgery to reduce or remove the prostate gland.

Overweight and obesity

Being overweight or obese puts more pressure on the pelvic floor muscles.

Bowel movement/Constipation

Straining to have a bowel movement like 'pushing down' can over stretch your pelvic floor muscles and make the muscles weaker.

Chronic Cough.

Chronic cough such as a smokers cough or a persistent cough, can damage and overstretch the muscles.

Increasing Age

It is common with increasing age as the muscles become weaker.

How can I exercise my Pelvic Floor Muscles?

The aim is to do the exercises 10 times each 3 times per day.

There are **two types** of pelvic floor exercises one type of exercise helps the muscles work longer without getting tired and **helps to strengthen** the muscles,

The other type **trains the power** of the muscles which helps to prevent leakage of urine when coughing, laughing, sneezing and doing physical activity.

It takes **time, effort and practice** to do the exercises correctly.

Learning to Exercise the Pelvic Floor Muscles:

These exercises can be done lying, standing or sitting.

- o If sitting, sit in a chair with your knees slightly apart.
- o Breathe normally, do not hold your breath.
- o Imagine you are trying to stop wind escaping from your back passage.
- o You will have to squeeze the muscles around the back passage. You should feel some movement in the muscles.
- o Don't move your buttocks or legs.
- o At the same time imagine you are passing urine and are trying to stop the flow of leaking urine. Squeeze the muscles around the opening from where you pass urine.
- o Start by holding the muscles for as long as you can. Don't worry if this is only 2-3 seconds at the beginning, with practice you can aim to hold for 10 seconds.
- o Try to repeat this hold until you get tired.
- o The aim is to hold for 10 seconds and then relax the muscles for 4 seconds. Repeat 10 times

These are called **slow exercises** or **slow pullups** and will help to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.

- o Now try to squeeze the same muscles quickly and hold for about 1-2 seconds, then let go quickly. Making sure you let go completely each time, try to repeat this exercise up to 10 times.

These are called **fast exercise** or **fast pullups**. You should feel a quick lift in your muscles with fast exercises or fast pullups.

- o Remember do not use your tummy, buttocks, or leg muscles when doing any of the exercises.