The pelvic floor is a bowl shaped group of muscles that sit at the base of your pelvis. If you “cup” your hands together in front of you, it is about the same size and shape as your hands.

The pelvic floor is made of layers of muscles which stretch backwards from just behind the pubic bone to the tailbone at the bottom of the spine.
For girls the Pelvic Floor has three openings going through the muscle layers, they are:

1. Urethra (the tube from your bladder to pass urine)
2. Vagina (birth canal)
3. Anus (back passage)
The pelvic floor has 3 main functions:

1. It keeps all your internal organs (for example bladder, bowels and uterus) in the right place so that they can work correctly. Your bladder and bowel need to be well supported if they are to work properly, this helps you to hold onto urine and faeces, until you can get to a toilet.
2 In adults, the pelvic floor plays a part in sex; keeping it healthy can bring benefits to a loving relationship.

sex!

3 The pelvic floor helps the baby during childbirth. The pelvis is a very bony and lumpy structure to get through and during childbirth the pelvic floor gently supports and guides the baby’s head past all the bony bits.

childbirth!
The pelvic floor muscles work with the abdominals and diaphragm to support the spine to keep us in an upright posture. Weakness in these muscles can lead to lack of support and increase the risk of back problems.
The pelvic floor muscles work together with the deep stomach muscles so exercising the pelvic floor muscles can help towards a flat stomach.

**Flat tum!**

Superficial pelvic floor muscles are located around the clitoris and contribute to sexual enjoyment. Also the stronger the pelvic floor muscles, the better the sexual pleasure can be for both partners.

The pelvic floor muscles contribute to the stability of the pelvis helping to reduce the risk of pelvic joint problems.

**Joint problems!**

The pelvic floor muscles help to control the bladder and bowels. If they become weak you may leak urine or faeces into your underwear.

**Be in control!**

SEX! the WOW factor!
Sit comfortably on a chair with knees apart and feet flat on the floor. Lean forward and rest your forearms on your thighs.

Draw up the muscle around your back passage as if trying not to pass wind. Hold on to this while you....

Rest for a few seconds before you try another one.

Try to hold this squeeze for a few seconds then relax completely.

...draw up the muscles around the vagina. Hold onto this while you....

...draw up around the front passage as if you are trying to stop yourself peeing...

This is a slow exercise, now try the fast one.
You can check that you are doing the exercises correctly.

When sitting or lying use a mirror look at the area between your legs. Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles - the skin between your back passage and vagina should lift and move away from the mirror.

Put your thumb into your vagina. When you exercise your pelvic floor muscles you should feel them tighten around your thumb.

**Thumbs UP!**

**Have a look! use a mirror!**

This is a pelvic floor muscle exercise!

Now try the same lift and squeeze but only hold for 1 second then relax and quickly squeeze up again.

Once you can do these exercises you can do them lying, sitting or standing at any time.
How many how often and when?

Like all muscles the pelvic floor muscles need regular exercise to remain strong and not let you down.

Exercise Positions

TRY... sitting down, standing or lying down

Find your best position and exercise!

Aim to do 10 slow and 10 fast exercises 3 times each day.
It may be hard at first and your muscles may get tired. If so start with 5 of each slow and fast exercise and build up to 10. The muscles will get stronger as you tone them up.

Try to find a good way to remind you to do them 3 times each day e.g. put a reminder in your phone, or always do them before each meal.

Vary your position; doing the exercises whilst sitting and standing as well as lying will make sure the muscles work for you in different positions.

Sudden pressure on your pelvic floor can cause problems. This can happen when sneezing, coughing, running, jumping or lifting. If you pull up and hold the pelvic floor muscles before you do any of these things it will help protect them from damage and help stop any leaks into your underwear.

Brace yourself!!!
What? Lifting heavy objects repeatedly (e.g. heavy bags, children) or doing high impact exercise (e.g. trampolining, high impact aerobics) or inappropriate unsupervised exercise (e.g. weight lifting or sit-ups).

Why? These activities can put too much strain on the muscles and can weaken the pelvic floor.

What can you do to help? Learn how to lift properly and safely. Brace your pelvic floor just before you lift.

What? Regular constipation.

Why? If you often strain and struggle to empty your bowels the nerves and muscles of the pelvic floor can be damaged.

What can you do to help? Eat a well balanced diet with 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day, Eat regular meals including breakfast. Drink 3-4 pints (1-2 litres) every day. This softens the stool (poo). However don’t drink a lot of fizzy sugary drinks or caffeine as these affect your bladder, bowels, teeth and weight! Regular exercise helps the bowel to work properly, try to do 30 minutes on most days.
What? Being very overweight (obese).

Why? Being obese puts extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles and causes weakness over time. It also increases your risk of leaking urine during exercise, lifting or movement (known as stress urinary incontinence).

What can you do to help? Try to keep to a healthy weight range. Find out from your school nurse or family doctor what a healthy weight should be for your age and height. If you are overweight ask for advice about how to lose it, but don’t use crash diets.

Weight!

What? Smoking

Why? Smoking doesn’t just affect your lungs! A persistent cough caused by smoking can weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Also, nicotine in cigarettes stimulates the bladder and can make you feel as though you need to pass urine urgently. (this is called urge urinary incontinence) Extra health fact – smokers are 6 times more likely to get bladder cancer than a non-smoker (Cancer Research UK) and are also more likely to get bowel cancer too.

What can you do to help? Visit www.smokefree.nhs.uk or call the free helpline number 0800 022 432 and talk to someone about how to stop smoking.

Smoking!
**What?** Childbirth.

**Why?** A mother gets heavier by about 2 stones (12.5kg) when she is pregnant (more for twins or a big baby). This weight puts pressure on the pelvic floor during the pregnancy. Also, the birth can weaken the muscles further.

**What can you do to help?** Practice your pelvic floor muscle exercises more during pregnancy. A healthy pelvic floor will be of great benefit during the birth itself and in the recovery period after your baby has been born. Having a baby too young, before your body has had time to develop properly, or catching a sexually transmitted disease is not good for the health of your pelvic floor and can leave you with problems later on in life. Avoid risky sexual activity or the dangers of teenage pregnancy.

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**What?** Persistent coughing (e.g. asthma).

**Why?** A persistent cough such as from asthma or bronchitis can weaken the pelvic floor muscles over time.

**What can you do to help?** Make sure that you use any prescribed inhalers correctly; the nurse at your doctor’s surgery will be able to give you more information and support.
Sometimes – pelvic floor problems just happen and we don’t really know why... but there may still be something that can help...

**Hormones!**

**What?** Hormonal changes.

**Why?** During the menstrual cycle your hormones fluctuate and sometimes just before and during a period your pelvic floor muscles can become weaker. During the period they may also ache.

**What can you do to help?** Pelvic floor muscle weakness due to menstruation is usually a temporary weakness and should get better when your period has finished. Doing pelvic floor exercises can help if your muscles ache, but if your periods are very painful you should see your doctor.

**Ask an expert!**
Ask for help if you are worried about your pelvic floor. There are specialists in your area who may be able to help you.

Your GP can refer you or you can often refer yourself. Pelvic floor specialists can often be found as part of a women’s health physiotherapy team or the continence service. You may find them by searching your local Primary Care Trust website (www.NHS.uk/servicedirectories).

There are also some charities that can help with further information and advice.

**PromoCon**
www.promocon.co.uk
0161 834 2001

**Bladder and Bowel Foundation**
www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org
0845 345 0165

**ERIC**
www.eric.org.uk
0845 370 8008
or text ERIC on 447 624 811 636

A leaflet for teenagers, designed by teenagers; in partnership with sixth form students from Morecambe Community High School

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