

# Relaxing the Pelvic Floor

## Physio Patient Information

## Patient Information

### Why do I need to relax my pelvic floor muscles?

If your pelvic floor is tense, sometimes described as 'overactive,' or 'non-relaxing,' it is very difficult to contract it effectively. You may feel as though you are not tightening your muscles enough if you have a tight pelvic floor, as it is already tense when you try to contract it. An overactive pelvic floor is also associated with bladder and bowel pain and dysfunction, pain with intercourse and chronic stress or anxiety.

### How do I relax my pelvic floor muscles?

- **Stretches**

Try these stretches, each for 5-10 slow diaphragmatic breaths as described in the Diaphragmatic Breathing leaflet.

1. a) Butterfly.

Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet facing each other. Use your arms behind you to help keep an upright posture as shown. You can support under the thighs with cushions if this is too strong.



- b) Supine butterfly. As above but lying down.

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2. Legs in V up wall. Get your bottom as near as possible to the wall before resting your legs in a V shape up the wall.



3. a) Knee hugs. Lying on your back, bend one leg and hug your knee towards your chest. Repeat on the other side after at least 5 breaths.

If you are more flexible, try:

b) Happy baby pose. Hold the outside edges of the feet. Gently rock from side to side, giving your lower back a gentle massage with the pressure of the floor.



- **Relaxation Practice**

Lie down with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed. You can do this sitting if that's easier for you. Listen to your breathing. Notice your natural breath pattern. Slowly begin to slow and deepen your breath using the techniques described in the Diaphragmatic Breathing leaflet.

Then follow these steps, or use your own relaxation techniques:

- Close your eyes to shut out external stimuli.
- Sit quietly and observe your breath – where does it go – does your ribcage move – or your shoulders... or neither. Notice if your shoulders and jaw are relaxed or tense.... Yawn and shrug – drop the shoulders on an exhale.

- Then Place your hands on the side of the ribcage. Take the breath more deeply into the lungs and feel your lungs expand. Exhale and they should retract.
- Slow it down. Even slower on the exhale. Try a little pause after inhaling and recheck the shoulders, drop them down again and exhale through pursed lips – sigh it out.
- As you continue with this breathing pattern, do a scan of your body. Legs, stomach, shoulders, face and jaw should all feel heavy and relaxed.
- Still continuing with the slow deep inhale/longer exhale breathing, imagine your pelvic floor opening and relaxing a little more on each inhale, the space between the sit bones widening as you sink into deeper relaxation.
- Then let your breathing return to its normal pattern, retaining the sense of deep physical relaxation.

Speak to your Pelvic Physiotherapist for more help and techniques to help with pelvic floor relaxation.

Please note that these exercises are a guide and an individualised assessment and exercise programme is often required. If you have ongoing concerns and would like to be assessed by a physiotherapist, please ask your GP or health visitor for a referral.

***This leaflet has been amended and reproduced with thanks to the Royal United Hospital Pelvic Health Team (Author: Jane Flanders, Relaxing the Pelvic Floor, Date of Publication July 2021, RUH PHY/046)***

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**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and [whc.pals@nhs.net](mailto:whc.pals@nhs.net)

**Patient and Public Involvement**

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at [ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net) or telephone 01249 454386.