PELVIC FLOOR AWARENESS
a guide for teenagers

ERIC
Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence
Most teenagers aren’t aware of their pelvic floor. It's unusual for teenagers to have pelvic floor problems but being aware of your pelvic floor can help you keep it in shape and avoid problems with leaking wee and poo when you are older.

### About the pelvic floor

The pelvis is the area between your hip bones and is the part of the skeleton that supports and protects your bladder and bowel - and womb (uterus) if you’re female.

The pelvic floor is made of layers of muscle, stretching from the pubic bone at the front of your body to the bottom of your spine at the back. These muscles create a supportive elastic area, a bit like a trampoline attached to the inside of the pelvis.
When you go to the toilet your pelvic floor muscles relax. They tighten again when you finish, stopping wee and poo leaking out and controlling wind.

If your pelvic floor muscles are weak or too strong they won’t work properly and you may find you leak when you cough, sneeze, laugh or pick heavy things up, or even when you run, jump or dance. Pelvic floor muscles that are too strong can also stop the bladder and bowel fully emptying.

Girls are more likely to experience pelvic floor problems than boys, simply because of the way their bodies are made.

**If you have an existing problem ensure that you visit your school nurse or doctor to get a proper assessment to identify any causes.**

A weak pelvic floor can be caused by:
- Constipation
- Not enough exercise
- Lots of very active aerobic exercise
- Being overweight
- Lifting heavy things
- Coughing a lot
- Having a baby

**Use it or lose it?**

You can keep your pelvic floor in good shape by learning to look after it. Being aware of your pelvic floor now and exercising it regularly can help you avoid problems with your pelvic floor in the future. Pelvic floor exercises won’t help all weeing and pooing problems, if you have any concerns visit your school nurse or doctor for an assessment.
How to identify your pelvic floor

When you tighten your pelvic floor, you pull up inside without needing to move your legs, tummy or bottom. If you concentrate and practise this feeling you'll feel the pelvic floor muscle working and you'll soon be able to exercise regularly to improve and look after your pelvic floor.

You know your pelvic floor is working well if you can stop the flow when weeing (try this occasionally, but not too often) and you can stop yourself passing wind.

Pelvic floor exercises

1. Get ready
   Sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart.

2. Start slowly
   Slowly squeeze inside and pull up the muscles you use to stop wee leaking and to stop passing wind. Try not to hold your breath or clench your legs, tummy or bottom while doing this and hold on as long as you can (up to 10 seconds if possible) and then relax. Repeat this slowly up to 10 times.

3. Speed up
   Pull up all the muscles quickly and hold and relax immediately. Repeat this quickly up to 10 times.

You can do these exercises anywhere and at any time and because the pelvic floor muscles are inside your body no one can see you exercising. This means you can exercise when standing in a queue, chatting to friends, using your laptop, texting or watching TV. If you do the exercises every day you'll start to feel your bladder and bowel control improve.

When you are confident doing pelvic floor exercises you can avoid leaks by preparing yourself and tightening your pelvic floor muscles as you feel a sneeze or cough coming or before lifting heavy things.

If you have any concerns about leaking wee or poo or if you need help to learn pelvic floor exercises contact your school nurse or doctor.
Top tips

When girls have a wee they should sit comfortably with knees apart and feet on the floor. Relax the pelvic floor muscles and let the wee flow in one continuous stream until completion; it is important to make sure that the bladder empties properly.

When boys have a wee they should stand comfortably. Relax and let the wee flow in one continuous stream.

Drink regularly through the day, water based drinks are best.

**Suggested daily fluid intake:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 – 13 years</td>
<td>1200 – 2100 ml</td>
<td>1400 – 2300 ml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 – 18 years</td>
<td>1400 – 2500 ml</td>
<td>2100 – 3200 ml</td>
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</tbody>
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Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables to avoid constipation.

Regular exercise will keep you in good condition. Find an exercise you enjoy such as jogging, cycling or dancing and try to exercise three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes each time.

A balanced diet combined with regular exercise will help you keep to a healthy weight.

Take care when lifting things by holding your back straight, knees bent and muscles firm. Always ask for help lifting heavy items.

Coughing a lot can cause pelvic floor weakness. A smoker’s cough can be avoided by not smoking.

Look after your pelvic floor through regular pelvic floor exercises.

**Do you want to know more?**

**Do you want to speak to someone in confidence?**

Contact ERIC - we’re here to help YOU.
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For information and support on bedwetting, daytime wetting, constipation and soiling call the ERIC Helpline (10am-4pm weekdays)

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