



# Core Breathing and Pelvic Floor Exercises

Your diaphragm is a large dome shaped muscle spanning the bottom of your ribcage. Your pelvic floor muscles are like a supportive hammock across the bottom of your pelvis. Together, your diaphragm and your pelvic floor muscles form the top and bottom of your abdominal space and need to work together.

**When you breathe in** your diaphragm flattens and lowers, putting gentle downward pressure through your abdominal space. Your pelvic floor needs to be able to relax and lower as this happens.

**When you breathe out** your diaphragm domes and lifts, releasing the pressure in your abdominal space. Your pelvic floor muscles can now lift also.

Think 'Breathe in and lower - Breathe out and lift'

## Core Breathing

**Find a comfortable position lying on your back with your knees bent.**

Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your lower tummy. Relax! Imagine you are sinking into the surface beneath you. Soften the muscles in your ribcage, shoulders, neck and jaw.

**Try these breaths:**

1. Breathe into your lower tummy. Feel it rise and fall with each breath.
2. Imagine you are breathing right down and out through the bottom of your pelvis.
3. Breathe into your ribcage, imagining that your ribs are like an umbrella opening out in all directions at once.
4. Now add all three breaths together.

This type of 'core breathing' helps your pelvic floor and your diaphragm to start working together. This will stop you from bearing down and creating lots of downward pressure through your pelvic floor muscles.

**Practice while lying on your back and on your side. When you feel like you can do the core breaths well, move on to sitting and standing positions.**



## Pelvic Floor Exercises

**Lie comfortably on your back with your knees bent and try the following pelvic floor squeezes, each on the out-breath of your core breathing:**

1. Squeeze and lift around your back passage, as if stopping wind.
2. Imagine you are lifting a blueberry up into your vagina.
3. Squeeze around your bladder opening, as if stopping the flow of urine.

Did you notice that the three squeezes feel quite different? Next try adding all three squeezes together. Different instructions can help different people. Pick the one below that makes the pelvic floor squeeze easiest for you:

- Lift and squeeze around all three areas at once (your back passage, vagina and bladder opening).
- Draw your sit bones together and lift up.
- Zip up from back to front by squeezing and lifting around your back passage, then your vagina and then your bladder opening one by one.

**Next, the exercises!** Do a core breath and then as you breathe out, perform a gentle lift and squeeze of your pelvic floor muscles using the instruction that works for you. Make sure you're not tensing muscles in any other areas such as your inner thighs.

How long can you keep your pelvic floor switched on with a steady squeeze? It may only be a second or two at the beginning but you can build this up over time, aiming for 10 seconds. Remember to breathe! Focus on breathing out into your ribcage and staying relaxed above your belly button.

**NICE Guidelines tell us that we should do these exercises:**

- 10 times, aiming for 10 seconds each
- Followed by 10 strong quick fire squeezes
- Three times daily

**Progress to sitting and standing as they get easier.**

You may want to download an app such as the Easy Kegel app to help you do the exercises (kegel is another name for pelvic floor exercises). Or set an alarm on your phone to remind you to do them. Think about picking daily activities during which you can practise, such as when you get into bed (lying), during advert breaks (sitting), and while the kettle boils (standing).