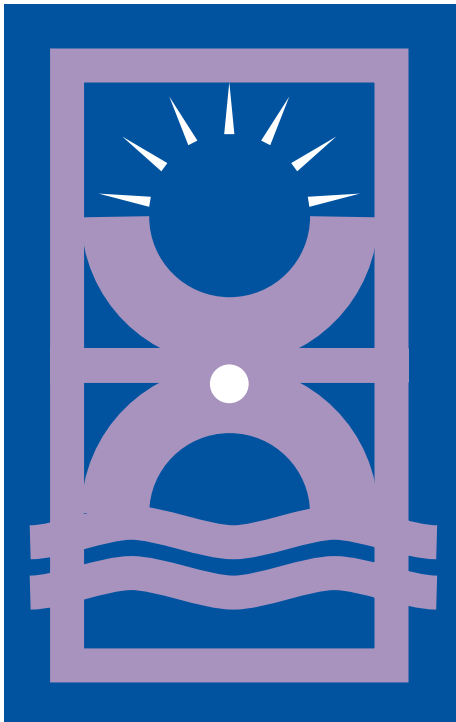




# One in three women who ever had a baby wet themselves.



## BLADDER CONTROL

Women who have one baby are nearly three times more likely to leak urine and wet themselves than women who have not had a baby. The more babies you have, the more chance there is that you will leak urine and wet yourself.

## Why do you lose urine after having a baby?

When the baby moved down through the birth canal, the nerves and muscles that keep the bladder shut (called the pelvic floor muscles) are stretched. This can leave the muscles weak so that they are not able to keep the bladder from leaking. This leaking happens mostly when you cough, sneeze, lift or exercise.

## Is this leaking likely to go away by itself?

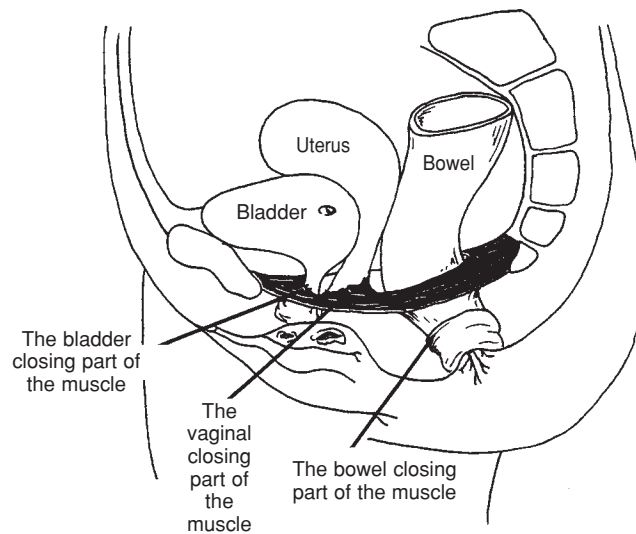
If you have any leaking, it is not likely to stop unless you exercise your pelvic floor muscles, to help them get their strength back. If you don't get the muscle strength back after each baby, when you reach middle age, you are likely to start wetting yourself, as the pelvic floor muscles tend to weaken more with age. Menopause can worsen incontinence.

## How do my waterworks work?

The bladder itself is a hollow, muscular pump. It holds about 400-500ml. The bladder fills slowly from the kidneys. The bladder closing muscles are called the pelvic floor muscles. When the bladder is filled, the pelvic floor muscles relax and the bladder squeezes the urine out. Then the same cycle begins over again.



### **The Muscles of the Pelvic Floor (diagram)**



### **What do my pelvic muscles do?**

See the diagram of the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles do a number of things such as:

- Help to close off the bladder, the vagina and the back passage (the anus).
- Help to hold the bladder, the uterus and bowel in their proper place.

### **What happens if my pelvic floor muscles are weak after the birth'?**

- You might leak urine when you cough, sneeze, lift, laugh or exercise.
- You might not be able to control your wind.
- You might feel a sense of urgency when you need to empty your bladder or your bowel.
- You might not have proper support for the bladder, your uterus or your bowel. When one or more of your pelvic organs sags down into your vagina, this is called pelvic organ prolapse. Prolapse is very common and happens to about one in ten women in Australia.

### **What can I do to prevent these things from happening?**

- Do pelvic floor exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor.
- Maintain good bladder and bowel habits as poor habits can lead to poor bladder and bowel control. Good habits are:
  - having at least 1.5 litres (6-8) cups of fluid per day unless otherwise advised by your doctor;
  - not going to the toilet 'just in case' as it can result in reduction of the bladder capacity; and
  - emptying your bladder completely when you go to the toilet.
- For more information, see the leaflets, 'Bladder Training' and 'Good Bladder Habits for Everyone' in this series.
- Protect your pelvic floor when operating your bowels. A good position when you sit on the toilet is to put your elbows onto your knees and with your feet close to the toilet, raise your heels. Relax your pelvic floor and gently push.



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The National Continence Management Strategy  
A Commonwealth Government Initiative

- Make sure you are not constipated as this can put extra pressure on the pelvic floor. (See leaflet ‘Constipation and Urinary Incontinence’ in this series.)
- Keep your weight within normal limits.

### How can I protect my weak pelvic floor?

The birth of the baby has stretched your pelvic floor. Any pushing down movements in the first weeks after the baby’s birth might stretch the pelvic floor again. You can protect your pelvic floor by not allowing any downward pressure on your pelvic floor. Here are a few suggestions to help you:

- Avoid any downward movement of your pelvic floor, except when you are opening your bowels.
- If you are able – squeeze, lift and hold your pelvic floor before each time you sneeze, cough and blow your nose or lift.
- If your pelvic floor muscles feel weak, try crossing your legs and squeezing them tightly together before each cough or sneeze.
- Try to avoid any heavy lifting [even at the gym] or bouncing exercises like jumping jacks.
- Avoid constipation. Strengthen your pelvic floor through exercises.
- Its alright to get up once every night to pass urine. Try not to go just because you had to get up to see the baby.

### How do I exercise my pelvic floor muscles properly?

When you do a proper pelvic floor muscle squeeze you should:

- Squeeze, lift and hold as if you are trying not to pass wind.
- Feel the pelvic floor lift.
- Make sure that you do not have any downward movement of your pelvic floor when you try to do a squeeze and lift.
- Feel the muscles of the lower part of your tummy pull in as you squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles.
- Squeeze, lift and hold your pelvic floor before every cough or sneeze for the rest of your life.

### How can I remember to do my exercises?

The hardest thing about pelvic floor exercises is remembering to do them. There are some things that you might try to help you to remember:

- It will be easier to remember if you do one set of exercises every time that you do a certain thing. Choose from the list which are the times that work best for you:
- When you go to the toilet.
- When you wash your hands.
- When you have a drink.
- When you change the baby.
- When you feed the baby.
- When you have a shower.



### **PELVIC FLOOR SQUEEZE EXERCISES**

A proper pelvic floor squeeze should lift up and hold hard. Pelvic floor exercises should be done both quickly and slowly.

Every squeeze, whether quick or slow, should be done as strongly and tightly as you can!

As pelvic floor muscles get stronger, you can hold your squeeze for longer. You should aim to hold a long squeeze for up to three seconds, or less if you can not manage this.

Squeeze and lift three times quickly without rests

**(THREE QUICK)**

Squeeze, lift and hold for three seconds, three times

**(THREE SLOW)**

Together, this is **ONE SET**

Try to do **THREE SETS** each day

+

Squeeze up hard, hold and cough

**THREE TIMES** a day

As you recover from the birth of your baby, you should gradually aim to do SIX squeezes, and hold each for at least SIX seconds. (you can then, if you like, increase the number of squeezes to 10 times and hold the squeeze for up to 8 or 10 seconds maximum each). Do this at least THREE times a day for the rest of your life

#### **If you notice any of the following ask for help from your GP:**

- Any leaking of urine.
- Have to rush when you need to go to the toilet.
- Not being able to hold on when you want to
- Leaking urine on your way to the toilet.
- Burning or stinging inside when you pass urine.
- Having to strain to start the flow of urine.



## Who can help?

### Contact:

- The health care professional helping you after the birth. This could be your GP, specialist, or mid-wife.
- Many community health centres have continence advisers.
- The Australian Physiotherapy Association can give you the name of the physiotherapist nearest to you who can help with pelvic floor exercises.
- National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66 (free call). (The Helpline can arrange telephone interpreters).

**Interpreters.** Some services can arrange an interpreter (of the same sex, if preferred), at no cost to you. Check with your service.

Telephone interpreter services are cheaper and often available immediately. For example, the Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) Doctors Priority Line provides a free service for doctors in private practice to talk with patients with poor English skills. Your doctor can book this service by phoning 1300 131 450.

### You can get more information from these other leaflets in this series:

- Urinary Incontinence. What is it?
- Good Bladder Habits for Everyone
- Bladder Training
- Constipation and Urinary Incontinence
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women
- Dementia and Urinary Incontinence
- Bladder Problems and the Prostate
- Incontinence Aids and Appliances
- Incontinence: Myths and Facts
- What is a Continence Assessment?
- A List of Ten Frequently Asked Questions
- Faecal Incontinence
- Surgery for Stress Incontinence in Women

