

Physical Activity with Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

A guide for patients



Are you avoiding physical activity due to pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD)?

You are not alone.

- 1 in 3 adults are not meeting the physical activity guidelines
- Women are less active than men across all age groups
- There are lots of reasons women struggle to exercise.



Women with Pelvic Floor Dysfunction (PFD) also worry about

- Making their condition worse
- Leaking urine during activity
- Struggling with pads

This often leads to women having to change or, even worse, avoid their favourite activities all together.

Benefits of physical activity

Lack of physical activity is the fourth leading cause of death globally. Being more physically active has many health benefits and reduces risk of suffering from many chronic health conditions.



For people living with long term conditions, the benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risks. Starting to be more active can feel overwhelming, but being more active can often improve your energy levels and make everyday tasks easier; it may even help you sleep better. Everybody has their own starting point, and you should stop and seek medical attention if you experience a dramatic increase in symptoms.

What about my pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD)?

- PFD might include stress urinary incontinence, urge urinary incontinence or vaginal prolapse
- Mild to moderate physical activity and being less sedentary decreases the odds of having or developing PFD, and most physical activity does not harm the pelvic floor
- Most symptoms during physical activity tend to be associated with repetitive jumping or bouncing during extreme training, so generally it is best to start with something low impact and build impact in, as able.

Pelvic floor exercise

If you think you have PFD, ideally you should be assessed by a specialist Women's Health Physiotherapist who will talk to you about your symptoms and goals, and advise you on any lifestyle changes or exercises you should be doing to tackle your PFD. They will guide you on how to strengthen your pelvic floor and support you to increase physical activity. They may also be able to give you specific advice on what types of activity you might benefit from or should potentially avoid.

For more information on pelvic floor exercises, you can look at the following link, or scan the QR code:

https://thepogp.co.uk/userfiles/pages/files/resources/20818_pogp_pelvicfloor_for_women_signed_off_1.pdf



Here is a short video link on how to perform your pelvic floor exercises: <https://vimeo.com/593193863/674bdd1458>



What are the guidelines for physical activity?

Recommendations are to:

- Undertake 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity over the course of a week
- Reduce the amount of time you spend sitting, as sedentary behaviour is a risk factor even if you reach the physical activity guidelines
- Include two sessions of strengthening activity each week if you can
- Incorporate some balance and flexibility work each week if you are an older adult

Moderate activity noticeably accelerates the heart rate. You will get warmer and breathe harder but should still be able to carry on a conversation; examples might be brisk walking, dancing, gardening, housework or carrying shopping.

Vigorous activity leads to heavy breathing and a higher heart rate. If engaged in vigorous intensity activity you could not

carry on a conversation; examples might be running, hill walking, fast cycling, aerobics, or competitive sports.

Strengthening activities should make muscles feel tension, shake or warm. Effective activities include lifting weights, ball games and racquet sports.

This can be broken down into short sessions each day, so it doesn't take too much time out from your busy schedule.

What types of physical activity are recommended with PFD?

Walking is a great place to start. It is low impact and reduces time that you are sedentary. Aim to achieve 8,000 -10,000 daily steps. Start with short, frequent bouts on flat ground and build up your time, distance, inclines, and uneven ground as you are able.



Pilates, if done correctly, is unlikely to cause pelvic floor harm and can increase core strength and improve your posture. Always start with the basics and progress as you are able. Modified Pilates is a good option, and exercises can be adapted if you feel any leakage or pressure.

Yoga is not only safe to do with PFD but has found to be effective in strengthening the pelvic floor too.

Swimming is low impact and safe.

Aerobic exercises tend to involve high impact repetitive movements. However, all movements can be modified to reduce the amount of impact and jumping. Your instructor might be able to help you adapt these exercises to allow you to move safely and without symptoms. In the gym you could chose to walk on the treadmill instead of running, and the cross trainer and stationary bike are also great options.

Running tends to involve repetitive movements that cause an increase in abdominal pressure. Consider alternative options such as walking, cross-training, cycling or rowing to begin with. If your symptoms and strength improve and you wish to try jogging or running, you could consider starting off slowly and building up e.g., couch to 5K.



Strength training should match your pelvic floor strength, so start with low weights. Remove or modify exercises that cause your symptoms. Breathe out on effort, avoid straining, and you may want to begin in a lying or seated position and progress to standing as you get stronger.



Low pressure fitness, also known as hypopressive exercise, involves specific breathing exercises and postures, and can be a good way to exercise your core without putting too much pressure on your pelvic floor.



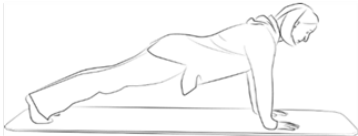









Diaphragmatic breathing is a great way to train your core to be able to cope with physical activity. Your physiotherapist can teach you how to do this and incorporate it into your exercise routine.

Belly dancing is a fun way to get moving and has been shown to be good for strengthening your core and pelvic floor.

General guidelines

- Do your pelvic floor strengthening exercises as guided by your physiotherapist
- Begin with low impact activity options and progress as able
- Ask your instructor for pelvic floor safe modifications
- If the exercise causes vaginal pressure or leakage of wind, urine or faeces, change it
- Increase resistance and impact as able.

Here are five exercises that can cause symptoms, with easier modifications

	
	
Plank	Wall Plank
	
Crunch	Standing Crunch
	
Mountain Climber	Bird Dog
	
Double Leg Lift	Tabletop
	
Jumping Jack	Step Out With Arms

Continence devices

Vaginal devices can be used to increase confidence and reduce leakage during physical activity.



Contiform, Efemia and Diveen and Contrelle are all available on prescription from your GP.

Supportive clothing

Supportive clothing and undergarments can also help to reduce symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction during physical activity examples, e.g., evbsport.com or srchealth.com.



Containment products

There are four main options for containment products. These can help to give you confidence to move more.

Disposable pads are easy to change, can be worn in your own underwear and are cheap per use. Disadvantages are that they can become expensive if you need a lot. You may want to speak to your GP about a District Nurse assessment to see if you can access support with supply of these. Pads can also rub on skin and cause irritation, so change them regularly to avoid dampness. You may feel self-conscious wearing these too or be worried about the environmental impact of using a disposable product.

Top tips: Period blood and urine differs in consistency so opt for continence pads rather than sanitary towels. Most big brands will send you a free sample. Remember the exit to the bladder is at the front, so wear your pad further forward than a sanitary towel. Pads range from low absorbency liners to thick highly absorbent pads; use the lowest absorbency that you can.

Common brands include Tena, Always, Attends, Staydry, Comfort cottons. and Natricare.

Reusable pads are made from material that can be washed and reused. Initial cost can be higher, but long term may be a cheaper option as they can be used many times.

Disposable pants are worn instead of your own underwear and are great for ease of movement. They can also absorb large volumes and are long and wide which can offer confidence against leaks. They come in all different shapes, styles, sizes, and absorbency, and can look like your own underwear. The disadvantage is that the whole underwear needs to be removed to change them, and they can be expensive. Again, the disposable nature of these products has an impact on the environment.

Common brands include Tena, Molicare and Always.

Reusable washable pants are waterproof and worn as underwear. They come in various absorbencies and materials. They are easy to wash, are great for the environment given that they are reusable, cause less irritation and can help with confidence as they feel more like regular underwear and are easy to move around in. The disadvantage would be needing to change the whole underwear if damp or wet and the initial outlay can make them a bit expensive. Common brands include Speax, Giggle Knickers and Love Luna.

Where to begin when starting physical activity?

Find your why!

To get into good habits with physical activity a top tip is to find a reason or goal, which motivates you to keep going. This could be as simple as being able to do your housework, walk your child to school, dance at a wedding or something more challenging such as running your first 5K. It's often a great way to meet new friends or catch up with old friends. It can be a great way to get some time out from your usual work or family obligations.

Do not feel guilty; it is important to take some time for self-care as it will make you better at looking after others. Don't be embarrassed if you haven't been active for a while, we all need to start somewhere.

Your physiotherapist has recommended the following exercise resource to support you to start increasing your physical activity. Please access the video via the following link, or scan the QR code

<https://vimeo.com/798762897/1d2aa10cb6>



Find your how!

Find a way that makes it as easy as possible to get into a routine. It could be as simple as taking the dog for a walk or meeting a friend for a walk regularly. You could consider a regular class, swimming, an online activity subscription, and there are loads of free workouts accessible online too.

Perhaps park the car a little further away from your destination or get off the bus early and walk the rest of the way. Ask your physiotherapist for ideas about how to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine. Perhaps consider asking for a referral to your local sports centre for support with increasing physical activity in a gym or class setting; they may offer discounted membership. It's important to start with small, bite-sized activities and gradually increase them so you don't get overwhelmed.

Get into the habit!

It takes a while to form a habit, so try and get into a routine with your new activity daily, weekly, or however often you can. Don't give up if you miss a session or two, just get started again. It can also help to set yourself a realistic challenge or small, short-term goal to keep you motivated and accountable. Even if you only have time for one or two minutes of exercise, do it, it all adds up.

Top tip!

It is important to do what makes you happy. That could be walking the dog and getting out in nature. It could also be meeting your friend for a chat at a local Pilates class. Do what makes you feel good otherwise you won't stick to it!



This leaflet was compiled by the Women's Health Physiotherapy Team, St John's Hospital, Howden, Livingston.

Disclaimer: This leaflet must only be given by a physiotherapist. This leaflet should only be used by specific individuals following physiotherapy assessment. If you have any concerns, please approach your physiotherapist.

Ref. Lothian: Physiotherapy. Physical activity with pelvic floor dysfunction. A guide for patient.

