



LEARN TO Relax Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

Excess tension in the pelvic floor muscles can cause various types of pain. Pain can be in the hips, low back, tailbone, vagina, or perineum (the area between the vagina or penis and the rectum).

If you have tried to get help for your pain, you were probably told to relax the pelvic floor muscles to help break the pain cycle. This may seem confusing. Many people need more specific instructions on how to relax these muscles. Fortunately, there are many ways to relax the pelvic floor. It just takes some focus and awareness.

You have probably been holding these muscles “tight” for a long time. When this happens, your brain accepts it as normal. The first step is to become aware of the tense muscles to let your brain know this is not normal and can be changed. Then, you can begin your practice to relax the muscles.

Remember, relaxing the pelvic floor muscles is a skill and it takes a lot of practice. Some techniques may work for you and others may not. Try them all until you find one that is right for you. Although you may not feel pain relief right away, it is important to keep trying and to continue practicing.

Practice at least 20 to 30 minutes, two times per day. The more you practice your relaxation technique, the better you will be at relaxing. As you become more aware of the muscles and how tense they are, relaxation will start to become automatic. Be patient, and keep trying until you are able to relax easily and quickly.

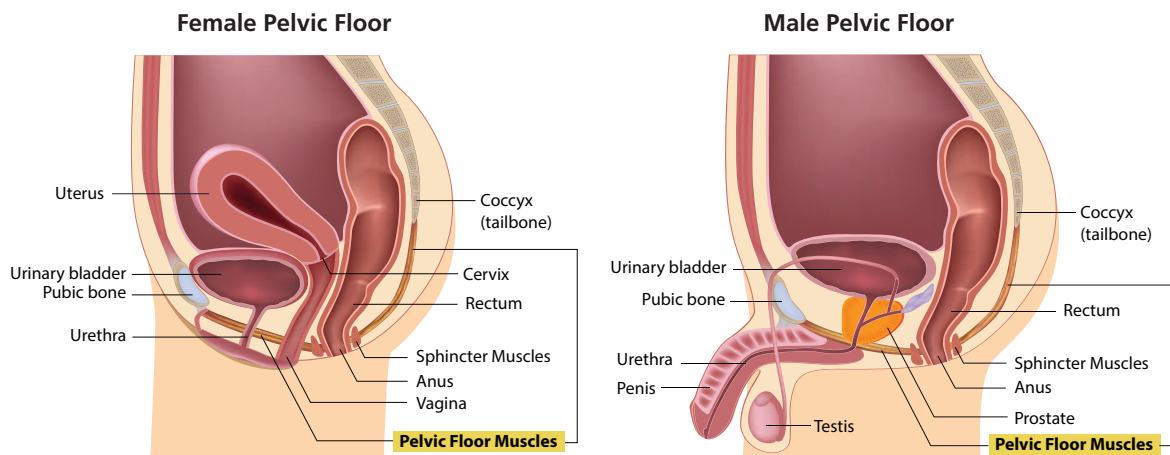
RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

We hope you find the following information helpful. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your physical therapist at **617-754-9100**.

Start in a quiet environment. Get into a comfortable position, possibly lying down or sitting in a supported position. Put the lights down low, but don’t fall asleep. Shut your phone off. This is how you should begin your practice. Once you’ve mastered relaxing in a quiet environment, learn how to relax in a less quiet environment. Our bodies have the ability to relax even while we are walking; it just takes practice.

Learn diaphragmatic breathing. This is a type of “deep breathing” to practice during all your pelvic relaxation exercises. First, take a slow, gentle breath in through your nose, and allow your belly and ribs to flare out to the sides. “Open” your pelvic floor with your inhale breath. Exhale slowly and gently through your mouth, allowing your belly to fall. Let the air out of your upper lungs, relax your ribs, belly and pelvic floor.

Practice visualization. Close your eyes and imagine you are in a quiet place that makes you feel relaxed. Picture a place in your mind that makes you feel most relaxed, such as a beach, mountain, or meadow — whatever picture works best for you. Imagine what you would see, hear, feel, and smell in this specific place.



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Find the pelvic floor muscles. Learn to make them contract and relax. First, look at the diagram of the pelvic floor muscles. The muscles sit like a hammock inside your pelvis. In the front, they start at the pubic bone, surround the vagina or penis and rectum, and attach in the back to your coccyx (tailbone). Picture the muscles in your mind. Imagine the muscles relaxing, contracting, and relaxing. Imagine how they would feel without pain or problems. Picture the muscles sagging down now, with your vagina or rectum (as a circle) getting larger, and your sitting bones (the bones in your pelvis) separating.

Pay attention to other areas of your body for signs of tension. Tension in other parts of your body may be making the tension in the pelvic floor muscles worse. Check various body parts (head, neck, shoulders, eyes, cheeks, jaw, arms, hands, legs, feet, ribs, belly, and buttocks) for tension. Now, gently release any area that feels tense. Allow yourself to entirely relax.

HELPFUL HINTS

Find support for handling stress. Social workers, psychologists, relaxation therapists, self-help groups, books, and tapes can help you learn how to manage stress effectively.

Set some time for yourself. Take care of yourself. Make it a priority and take the time to relax.

Be the manager of your care. Follow the instructions of the people caring for you and participate in your care as much as you can. Ask questions whenever needed.

Stretch frequently during the day. Avoid being in one position for too long.

Do not overexert yourself. Know your limits and listen to your body. Do not tire yourself out.

This material was developed in 2016 by clinicians from Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. © Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, 5/16. All rights reserved.