



LISA WESTLAKE

5 STEPS TO A HEALTHY PELVIC FLOOR

Like any other muscle in the body, a woman's pelvic floor also needs regular attention to remain healthy. *Lisa Westlake* examines what can sometimes feel a bit like 'secret women's business'.



One in five Australians and one in three mums have problems with bladder or bowel control related to a compromised pelvic floor. Many suffer in silence. Unfortunately, certain exercises can cause or exacerbate incontinence with two possible outcomes:

1. women ignore it, making their situation worse; or
2. embarrassed and frustrated by their 'leaking,' they cease exercising altogether.

Both are equally undesirable consequences.

The great news is, there is plenty you can do to help your pelvic floor, and continue to reap the physical and psychological benefits of staying active. And, not only will a strong pelvic floor provide good bladder and bowel control (now and in the future), it also assists in spinal stability to keep your back strong, as well as boosting sexual function and satisfaction.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

- National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66
- www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au
- www.continence.org.au

So, here are 5 tips for active women, to help ensure a healthy pelvic floor:

1 Make pelvic floor muscle training (PFMT) part of your day. To do this, complete 3 long holds or 8 quick lifts, 2 to 3 times a day. This only takes a few minutes and is an invaluable investment in your future health.

2 Include PFMT during your workouts. For example, do a three pelvic floor sets during your weight training regime, of one long hold or five quick lifts.

3 Technique matters! You should be lifting your pelvic floor upwards, as if you are trying to control wind or stop the flow of urine. Be sure to breathe normally during the lifts and avoid clenching any other muscles. If you are unsure, check with a physiotherapist who specialises in women's health.

4 Make your fitness activities pelvic floor-friendly. To do this, for every exercise you undertake, the first muscles you recruit should be your pelvic floor and core abdominals. Then, during exercise, if you notice you are holding your breath, bearing down (e.g., pushing), leaking or losing control of wind, or feeling a heaviness in your saddle/pelvic floor area, then modify the exercise to be less stressful on your pelvic floor (i.e., decrease the load, intensity and/or

repetitions). Exercises that typically need modification include:

- High impact moves such as running. Swap for incline walking on the treadmill or cycling.
- Heavy muscle conditioning activities. Instead, decrease the load and increase the repetitions.
- Wide deep squats. Swap for narrow wall squats with a Swissball.
- Sit ups. Replace these with less intense abdominal curls and modified hovers.

5 Seek professional advice. Many women think incontinence is normal and suffer in silence. But the truth is, there is lots that you can do to improve your situation and future! If you have any concerns about your pelvic floor find a women's health and continence physiotherapist. They will help you regain control, and before you know it you'll be taking your health to new levels – both inside and out! **OH!**