

Exercises for the Pelvic Floor and Core

This document provides detailed instructions for exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor and core muscles. It covers pelvic floor exercises, diaphragmatic breathing, transverse abdominis exercises, and the alternate arm/leg lift. The exercises are designed to improve core strength, coordination, and overall pelvic health. Proper technique and precautions are emphasized throughout.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

These exercises target the muscles that support the bladder, uterus, and rectum. They can help with incontinence, improve sexual function, and reduce back pain.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

This breathing technique helps to engage the diaphragm, which is a major muscle involved in core stability.

Transverse Abdominis Exercises

The transverse abdominis is a deep abdominal muscle that helps to stabilize the spine and support the pelvic floor.

Alternate Arm/Leg Lift

This exercise strengthens the core muscles while improving coordination and balance.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Learn to contract and relax pelvic floor muscles. Visualize pulling fluid through a straw. Hold for 2 seconds, relax for 2 seconds. Repeat 10 times, 3 sets per day.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Sit upright, breathe in through nose, exhale slowly through pursed lips. Coordinate with pelvic floor contractions.

Transverse Abdominis Exercises

Lie on back, knees bent. Pull belly button toward spine. Hold for 3-5 seconds. Build to 25 repetitions.

Alternate Arm/Leg Lift

On hands and knees, extend opposite arm and leg. Hold for 3 seconds. Alternate sides. Start with 5 sets, build to 10.

Pelvic Floor and Core Exercise Instructions

The pelvic floor, back and buttock muscles, abdominals, and our diaphragm are all components of the core. The pelvic floor is the foundation of our entire core and works in tandem with all the muscles of the core with every motion we make. It is important to understand how to perform a pelvic floor contraction and relaxation correctly before engaging in exercises that engage the core.

Pelvic floor exercises

A note before we start: Pelvic floor exercises should NOT be painful. If you have pain with the exercise or you cannot figure out how to do the contraction, please see a pelvic physical therapist or pelvic occupational therapist. They can assess whether a pelvic floor exercise is appropriate and, if it is appropriate, how you can correctly perform the pelvic floor exercises.

Note that some people need to work on relaxation of the pelvic floor before they can progress to strengthening the pelvic floor. It is best to learn how to do these exercises in isolation initially so that you can feel them and progress them. As you get stronger it is important to engage your pelvic floor in tandem with other exercises since it mimics how our pelvic floor and core work during our daily routines.

Learning how to engage your pelvic floor muscles can be difficult to accomplish at first, since it is not easily visible (unless you would like to use a mirror). To make it easier, you can envision that you have a straw in your vaginal or anal canal – ***do not actually insert a straw*** – and you would like to pull fluid up through the straw. You will feel your muscles drawing up and inward as you do this. There should be no activity at your buttock/bottom muscles or in your belly!

Do not hold your breath. In fact, once you feel that you can correctly contract and relax your pelvic floor well you should begin coordinating breathing and your pelvic floor contractions.

The proper method is to gently blow your air out through your mouth as you contract your pelvic floor, breathe in as you relax. Begin by holding the contraction for 2 seconds and relaxing for 2 seconds. Repeat a set of 10 of these. Over time you can increase your hold time and relax time as long as you are not experiencing pain or difficulty. Repeat a set of 10 over the course of the day for a total of 3 sets. This exercise is explained in detail in the book "**The Musculoskeletal Mystery: How to solve your pelvic floor symptoms**".

Diaphragmatic breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing engages your pelvic floor and improves overall core function. It can also do wonders for improving mood and a positive attitude! When you first begin to do this exercise, it is helpful to sit upright and in a comfortable position, in a chair, with both feet on the floor.

To perform proper diaphragmatic breath, you should breathe in through your nose, until your lungs/chest feel full. You can also put your hands on the sides of your rib cage so you can feel your ribs expanding. Once you have filled your lungs with air, slowly blow the air out through your mouth. Avoid forcing the air out. Instead, you should slowly exhale the air out through pursed or puckered lips.

Do not hold your breath while exercising. In fact, once you learn how to coordinate breathing and pelvic floor exercises you can start gently blow your air out through your mouth as you contract your pelvic floor and then relax your pelvic floor as you breathe in. This exercise is explained in detail in the book "**The Musculoskeletal Mystery: How to solve your pelvic floor symptoms**".

Transverse abdominis exercises

The transverse abdominis muscle is the part of the abdominals that runs across your abdominal cavity. Imagine how a corset hugs around the belly. The transverse abdominis also hugs around your belly in the same way and one of its jobs is to hold your belly in like a corset.

As a bonus, when you engage your transverse abdominis your pelvic floor muscles respond and also gently engage. Most people cannot feel this happening, but it is! When you are first learning to engage your transverse abdominis start in a position of lying on your back with your knees bent so that your feet are flat on the floor.

Gently pull your belly button toward your backbone without pushing with your legs or tightening your buttock. There should be a gentle contraction in your lower abdominals. You can place your fingers just to the inside of your pelvic bones to feel the muscles gently contract. Blow air out gently as you are contracting your transverse abdominis (3-5 seconds). Breathe in when you have completed the contraction. Start off slowly with a few repetitions and build as you tolerate. A good goal is twenty-five repetitions.

Alternate Arm/Leg Lift

This is a fantastic way to work your entire core. It engages your back, buttock, abdominals, and pelvic floor. You will get the bonus of improved coordination and balance! Begin this exercise on Your Hands and Knees.

Keep your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Slowly bring your right hand out in front of you and your left leg out behind you. It is very important to gently pull your belly button toward your backbone as you keep your back flat. Hold that position for 3 seconds, put your arm and leg down into the original position and then lift your left hand out in front of you and your right leg out behind you. Hold that for 3 seconds. Alternate back and forth. You can start with 5 sets and build to 10 sets. Variations include holding for 10 seconds and eventually progressing to 10 sets as you build tolerance. You should not have pain when you do the exercise, but you may feel fatigue when you first start doing this exercise.