

Strengthening Your Core to Cure Incontinence

Pelvic floor. Core strength. No; you haven't just stepped through the doors of your local gym.

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that form a hammock across the opening of the pelvis and support all lower organs. When pelvic muscles or tissue weaken—from pregnancy, vaginal childbirth, radiation treatment, pelvic surgery, obesity, menopause, etc.—they can no longer support your organs and may ultimately lead to a pelvic floor disorder. One of the most common pelvic floor disorders is urinary incontinence. And although many people suffer from this, they are either too embarrassed to see a specialist and/or don't realize that there is help.

"Many people learn to live with a pelvic floor disorder and the incontinence that may result," notes Kelly Huestis, Clinical Coordinator for Upper Chesapeake Health's Pelvic Floor Program, "despite the fact that they can receive relief from this debilitating condition."

This is where your core strength comes into the equation.

The pelvic floor plays a significant role in your body's core. It contracts simultaneously with the deep muscles of your back and abdomen to provide strength, support, and stability to your spine and organs whenever you move. Strengthening the core can reduce or eliminate urinary incontinence by restoring support to the pelvic organs and helping to control against leakage.

Huestis suggests that men and women follow these steps to retrain and/or strengthen their core, whether they're already suffering from incontinence or simply want to prevent it.

Retraining Your Core

Lie flat on your back or sit straight up.

1. Contract pelvic floor:

- Place 1-2 fingers on your abdomen, just 1-2 inches inside of your hip bones.
- Imagine you are trying to stop your urine flow; contract as if trying to stop from passing gas.
- If done correctly, you will feel a slight contraction.

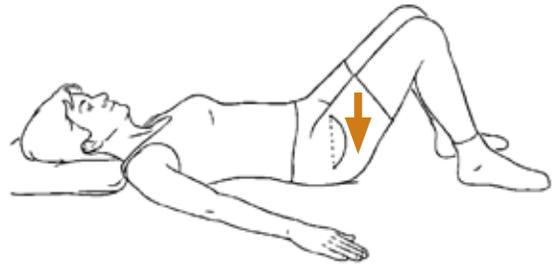
2. Add the transversus abdominis (stomach muscles):

- Contract pelvic floor as above and keep pelvic muscle relaxed.
- Breathe in and breathe out.
- As you breathe out, slowly draw in the lower abdomen to draw your navel up and in towards your spine.
- Imagine you are putting on a tight pair of pants; hold for 3-5 seconds while continuing to breathe.
- If done correctly, you will feel gentle tension deep in the abdomen.

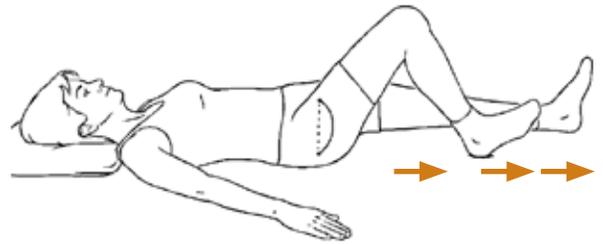
Strengthening Your Core

1. Once you can successfully perform the core contraction, try it in other positions such as sitting, standing, or bending.
2. When you can contract it easily, try the following:

- a. Lying on your back with knees and hips flexed, slowly drop open the right knee to your right. Keep your back and pelvis level. Return to center and repeat on the left.



- b. Lying on your back with knees and hips flexed, slide the right foot along the floor, straightening the knee. Slide the foot back towards the buttock and repeat with the left.



- c. Lying on your back with knees and hips flexed, slowly lift the right foot off the floor about 6 inches, keeping the knee bent. Bring it back down. Repeat on the left side.



3. Try to incorporate this core contraction into everyday activities, when moving in and out of a chair or bed, lifting something, or bending.

Not sure about your technique? Want to speak to someone about incontinence? Contact the Upper Chesapeake Health Pelvic Floor Program.



For more information,
call **443-643-3257**.