

pelvic floor first

**Protect your  
pelvic floor and  
stay in control**



# Exercise is an important part of healthy living.

It improves your body and mind. However, one size doesn't fit all when it comes to exercise. So if you have, or are at risk of, pelvic floor problems, it's important to speak to your fitness instructor and tailor your exercise program to suit your needs.

## What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is the base of the group of muscles commonly referred to as your 'core'. These muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control and sexual sensation.

## How can I tell if I have a pelvic floor problem?

Common signs that can indicate a pelvic floor problem include:

- accidentally leaking urine when you exercise, play sport, laugh, cough or sneeze
- needing to get to the toilet in a hurry or not making it there in time
- constantly needing to go to the toilet
- finding it difficult to empty your bladder or bowel
- accidentally losing control of your bowel
- accidentally passing wind
- a prolapse (pressure, bulging or discomfort in the pelvic area)
- pain in your pelvic area, or
- painful sex.



## Who's at risk of pelvic floor problems?

People who are most at risk of pelvic floor problems are:

- pregnant women
- women who have recently, or ever, had a baby
- women who are going through, or have gone through, menopause
- women who have undergone gynaecological surgery such as a hysterectomy
- men who have undergone surgery for prostate cancer, and
- elite athletes such as runners, gymnasts or trampolinists.

This risk is higher if you:

- have a history of back pain
- have ever experienced injury to your pelvic region
- are constipated
- strain when you go to the toilet
- have a chronic cough or sneeze, including those linked to asthma, smoking or hayfever

- are overweight, obese or have a Body Mass Index over 25, or
- constantly lift heavy weights, either at the gym, or as part of your job.

If you fall into one of these categories it's important that you speak to a doctor or continence professional.

It's also important that you speak to your fitness instructor about pelvic floor safe exercises that will not stress your pelvic floor. Certain exercises can cause or increase pelvic floor problems over time.



## What kind of exercises can stress the pelvic floor?

Some exercises place more stress on your pelvic floor than others. These exercises include:

- running
- jumping
- star jumps
- skipping
- boxing
- sit ups, curl ups or crunches
- deep lunges or wide legged squats
- lifting or pressing heavy weights
- double leg lifts (usually done with ab exercises)
- high impact exercise classes that involve jumping and running, and
- sports involving stop start running and rapid direction change (e.g. tennis, netball, basketball, hockey or touch football).

If you experience pelvic floor problems and are currently doing any of these exercises speak to your fitness instructor about developing a tailored program to suit your needs. It is also important to speak to a doctor or continence professional to help get you back in control.

## Pelvic floor safe exercises

Pelvic floor safe exercises refer to exercises that place less stress on your pelvic floor. These exercises are suitable for people who experience, or are at risk of, pelvic floor problems.

The best program is one developed especially for you by your fitness instructor or continence professional.

Trying to figure out which exercises are pelvic floor safe can be tricky. As a general rule, try to avoid high impact or high intensity exercises that place downward pressure on your pelvic floor.

Some common pelvic floor safe exercises include:

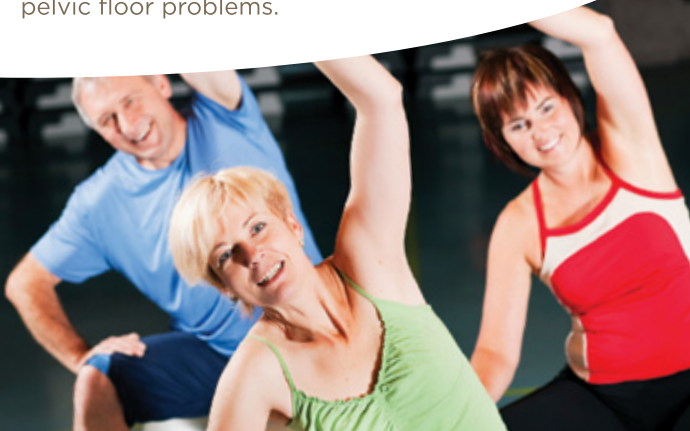
- walking
- swimming
- seated cycling
- low intensity water aerobics, and
- low impact exercise classes.

You can also protect your pelvic floor by making small changes to the way you exercise. Examples of these changes include:

- sitting on a Swiss ball to support your pelvic floor when you use hand held weights
- using seated equipment where you can adjust the weights
- using lighter weights
- breathing out with effort as you push, pull, lift or lower a weight
- reducing the level of your abs program
- reducing the depth of your squats and lunges
- keeping your legs closer together when you exercise, and
- maintaining a relaxed upright posture when you exercise.

Pelvic floor problems are not a life sentence. With the right help they can be treated and in many cases cured.

Whatever your symptoms, whatever you do, don't stop exercising, seek help to make sure your exercise program is the right one for you.



# How can I find out more?

To find out more visit  
[www.pelvicfloorfirst.com.au](http://www.pelvicfloorfirst.com.au) or  
call **1800 33 00 66**. You will find:

- a detailed list of pelvic floor safe exercises and exercises to avoid
- useful tips on how to make sure your fitness program is pelvic floor safe
- free brochures about pelvic floor muscle exercises, including how to do them, and
- details of continence professionals.