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TONE YOUR PELVIC FLOOR

Shaping up these deep muscles is not only vital for women after childbirth, it's good for your core as a whole

The deepest underlying muscles of the lumbar spine form what can be termed the 'stability cylinder' around the lower spine. The pelvic floor is the bottom of the cylinder, the diaphragm is the top of the cylinder, and the transversus abdominus muscles form the sides. A toned pelvic floor can improve continence, particularly after childbirth. And performing a pelvic floor contraction can cause neural overflow into the other stability muscles of the lumbo-pelvic region, acting as a good 'cue' for enhancing the core as a whole.

Pelvic floor contractions

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Locate the most prominent knobby bones at the front of your pelvis.
- Move your fingers one and a half inches inwards, then downwards from this point towards your pubic bone, and press your fingers deep into your lower abdomen.
- Without holding your breath, contract your pelvic floor with 50 per cent effort. This should feel like contracting the muscles you use to hold a tampon in, or for men, drawing your testicles up into your abdomen. You should feel a mild increase in the firmness of the muscles under your fingers.
- Hold this for 10 seconds, 10 times. Make sure you don't hold your breath, tense up your shoulders, tighten your bum or your upper abdomen.



Bent knee fallout

- Lie on your back with one leg bent and one leg straight. Contract pelvic floor, as in exercise 1.
- Whilst you are doing so, slowly let your bent leg fall to the side without letting your pelvis roll over in the direction of the leg. Imagine you are trying to balance a tray of drinks on your pelvis as your leg moves out to the side.
- Only move your leg in the range at which you can still balance the imaginary tray, to a maximum of 45-50°.
- Perform 10-20 times on each side.



Sitbacks

- Get on all fours with your shoulders over hands and hips over knees. A bottle balanced on your back can help with this exercise.
- Set your shoulder blades wide and your spine in a slight 'S' shape; don't let your head hang down.
- Contract your pelvic floor and simultaneously sit back towards your heels without letting your lower back arch upwards - i.e. move from the hips and not the spine.
- Perform 10-20 times.

