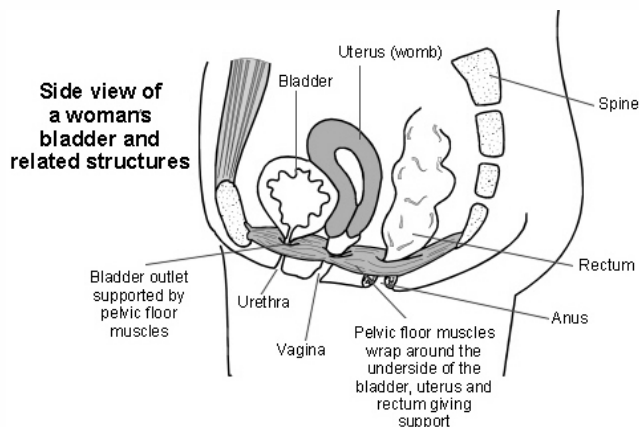




## The Pelvic Floor & Incontinence

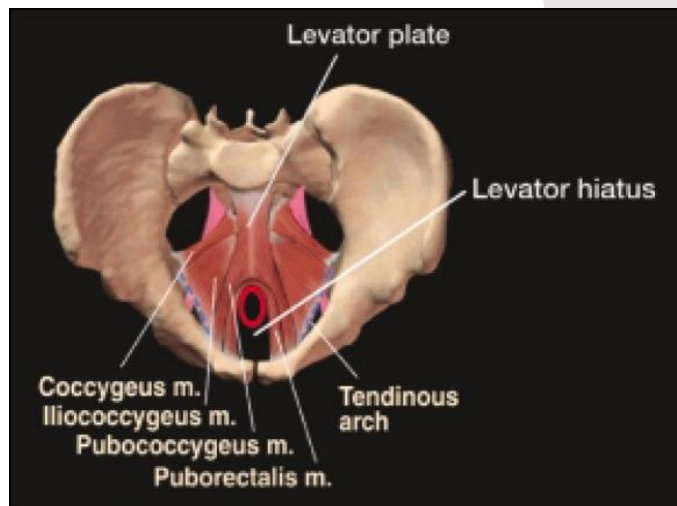
The pelvic floor is a sheet of muscle and connective tissue at the base of the pelvis. It is important for both maintaining continence and supporting the pelvic joints to prevent back, pelvic or groin pain. The pelvic floor includes the coccygeus, iliococcygeus, pubococcygeus and puborectalis muscles.



Stress incontinence occurs when the pressure in the bladder exceeds that in the urethra. Small amounts of urine escape if the pelvic floor is unable to close the urethra off well enough. This is the incontinence or leakage that happens with coughing, sneezing, laughing and exercising.

In normal function the pelvic floor turns on more strongly just before you cough, sneeze or laugh. This ensures the urethra is closed off and urine

can't escape. If the pelvic floor muscles are weak or too slow at turning on urine can escape from the urethra and you leak.



The connective tissue of the pelvis is also important for maintaining continence. It is thought the pelvic floor muscles compress the urethra against the connective tissue to stop the flow of urine through it. It's like stepping on a garden hose on a concrete path to stop the flow of water through it. If the connective tissues are damaged or loose, the pelvic floor muscles need to be even stronger to compress the urethra against them. Tearing of the connective tissue can occur with vaginal

childbirth or other trauma.

The urethra is normally thick and flushed with a good blood supply. It's like a pliable, thick walled spongy hose which is a bit sticky on the inside. The actual lumen or hole is small as the walls are thick and so it's not hard to reduce the flow of urine through it. The urethra becomes stiffer with thinner walls and a larger lumen with age and when hormone levels reduce at menopause. This type of hose is harder to reduce the flow of water through it. This makes it easier for leakage to occur as we age.

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Both the muscles and the fascia are important to normal functioning of the pelvic floor. Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, the pelvic floor is only as strong as its weakest part. Both the connective tissue and the muscle can be injured in vaginal childbirth or other trauma. The muscles may be weak and poorly controlled just like other muscles of the body due to lack of optimal use. This can be due to poor postural habits, poor toileting habits or just poor co-ordination of the muscles.

There are both deep and superficial muscles that form the pelvic floor. The deep portion is important for maintaining continence and support for the pelvic organs to prevent prolapse. The superficial portion has more of a role in sexual function. When assessing the pelvic floor with an internal examination, we are looking mostly at the deeper part. We look at the pull from the left and right sides and from the back to the front. A deficiency in just one area can cause incontinence.

Most stress incontinence can be completely cured by learning to work the pelvic floor muscles. Don't suffer in silence or think it's something you just have to put up with. Call for an appointment to help us help you.

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