

Urinary Incontinence in Cystic Fibrosis

Patient Information Leaflet

Women with Cystic Fibrosis are more likely to experience bladder issues compared to a healthy population. Listed below are some of the most common problems.

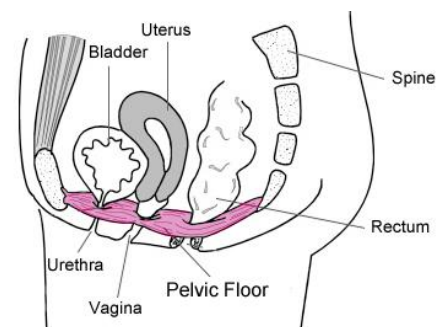
- **Urinary incontinence:** the complaint of involuntary loss of urine
- **Frequency:** going to the toilet more than 7 times a day
- **Urgency:** the sudden and overwhelming feeling that you need to urinate
- **Urge urinary incontinence:** involuntary leakage accompanied by or immediately after a strong sudden urge to urinate
- **Stress urinary incontinence:** involuntary leakage that occurs with exertion such as coughing, sneezing or lifting a load
- **Mixed urinary incontinence:** a combination of stress and urge incontinence

If you are experiencing symptoms of *urge urinary incontinence* please inform your physiotherapist as some of the exercises may not be appropriate for you.

The prevalence of urinary incontinence in women with Cystic Fibrosis ranges from 30% to 74%, with stress urinary incontinence being the most common type reported. Stress urinary incontinence can be distressing and affect your quality of life and your ability to do airway clearance and exercise. This leaflet explains the reasons behind stress urinary incontinence and offers advice on how to minimise your symptoms.

What is the pelvic floor?

Your pelvic floor is made up of layers of muscles and tissue which stretch from your pubic bone at the front to your tailbone at the back. They act like a sling to support your bladder, womb and bowel. There are three openings in the pelvic floor (urethra, vagina and rectum). The pelvic floor muscles work around these openings to help control the bladder, bowel and they are important for during intercourse.



What causes weakness in the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor muscles can become weaker over time. The abdominal muscles contract strongly during a cough. This increases the pressure on the bladder and

pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles need to contract with every cough to prevent leakage. This process usually happens automatically.¹

The reason why people with Cystic Fibrosis are at increased risk of leakage is not fully understood. The muscles often have good strength, but sometimes they are unable to maintain enough pressure to counteract the forces caused by intense, prolonged coughing, and leaking occurs as a result.¹

Other factors that can cause pelvic floor weakness include pregnancy and child birth, straining due to constipation, obesity and lack of general fitness.

How to Locate your Pelvic Floor Muscles:

- The pelvic floor muscles can be difficult to isolate and exercise as you cannot see them. You may need to use your imagination a little to target the correct muscle group.
- Begin in a comfortable position, such as lying on your back or side, or sitting supported. Keep the muscles of your thighs, bottom and stomach relaxed.
- Try and breathe normally as you do the exercises and do not hold your breath.

Start by taking a breath in, and as you breathe out, pull up and gently tighten the muscles around your *back* passage, as if you are trying to stop passing wind. Hold for as long as you can comfortably. Allow the muscles to relax fully for 3 seconds.

Then, take another breath in and as you breathe out, pull up and tighten the muscles at the *front*, as if you are trying to stop passing urine. You may feel the muscles around your back passage squeeze also, this is normal. Hold for as long as you can comfortably. Allow the muscles to relax fully for 3 seconds.

There are two types of pelvic floor muscle exercises:

1.) Slow Pelvic Floor Muscle contraction for endurance

Once you have located your pelvic floor muscles you can begin to exercise them. Take a breath in and as you breathe out tighten around the back passage and around the front together. Lift the pelvic floor muscles upwards and forwards. Make sure that you are not lifting your bottom off the chair. You may feel the lower part of your stomach gently draw in, this is normal. Remember to try and breathe normally while holding the contraction.

Hold for as long as you can comfortably. This may only be for a second or two initially if your muscles are weak. Over time, build up to holding for up to 10 seconds. Allow the muscles to relax fully for 3 seconds. Repeat this 10 times, 3 times a day.

2.)Fast Pelvic Floor Muscle contraction to build up strength

Take a breath in and as you breathe out, quickly pull up the front and back passage together, holding for 1 second. Let go and feel the muscles relax fully for 3 seconds. Repeat x 10 times, 3 times a day.

Helpful Tips

The Knack: Use this fast pelvic floor muscle squeeze before you sneeze, cough, laugh or huff. This helps prevent leaking from the bladder and should become a lifelong habit.

Posture: Good posture during airway clearance is essential. Research shows that the muscles involved in coughing and control of the pelvic floor work best with the spine straight and in an upright position¹(e.g. sitting with back supported and feet on the floor).

Healthy Bladder/Bowel:

- Drink 8 glasses of water a day.
- Limit your intake of drinks containing caffeine as this can irritate the bladder. These include tea, coffee, some fizzy drinks, hot chocolate and green tea.
- Other drinks that can irritate the bladder include sparkling water and alcohol.
- If you suffer with urinary urgency and frequency, avoid having citrus foods and drinks such as oranges, limes, lemons, fruit juices and tomatoes.
- Avoid bad bladder habits like going to the toilet "just in case".
- Avoid constipation, as straining to empty the bowels can put pressure on pelvic floor and add to muscle weakness. See the correct position for opening your bowels on the next page.
- Eat foods rich in fibre such as fruit and vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals. Limit fatty foods such as cakes, biscuits and pastries.
- If increasing fibre in your diet do so gradually to allow your digestive system time to adjust and ensure your fluid intake is adequate.
- Speak with your dietitian if you have any specific dietary concerns.

References:

1. cysticfibrosis.org.uk
2. For more information on frequency, urgency and bladder retraining please visit <https://www.yourpelvicfloor.org/conditions/bladder-training/>
3. User friendly book: "**Hold It Sister**" by Mary O'Dwyer

*If you have any queries regarding this information sheet or any other aspects of incontinence, please contact Cork University Hospital **Physiotherapy Department** on **021 4922400**. You may improve with advice and exercise, but a referral to a women's health physiotherapist for investigations can sometimes be necessary.*

Correct position for opening your bowels

Step one



Knees higher than hips

Step two



Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees

Step three



Bulge out your abdomen
Straighten your spine

Correct position



Knees higher than hips
Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees
Bulge out your abdomen
Straighten your spine