

icons

Identifying Continence Options after Stroke

Pelvic floor muscle training protocol

Overview

Pelvic floor muscle training will be introduced following an assessment by a physiotherapist to ensure the patient is able to exercise their pelvic floor muscles.

The objectives of the pelvic floor muscle training programme are to:

- deliver the pelvic floor muscle training
 - including initial and ongoing training
- evaluate adherence with the exercise regime (in the form of a daily record)
- identify barriers to adherence and provide advice on how to overcome these.

ONCE THE PATIENT HAS BEEN ASSESSED AS ABLE TO BEGIN THE PROGRAMME, IMPLEMENT THE FOLLOWING PROTOCOL.

EACH SET OF EXERCISES TO BE DONE TWICE A DAY and to be supervised by a member of nursing staff if at all possible.

Protocol

Patient education

Go through the Patient Education booklet with the patient; family and/or friends can be present if the patient would like them to be.

Pelvic floor muscle training

Explanation of how to do pelvic floor exercises

You may like to use the following wording:

“Choose any comfortable supported sitting or lying position, with your knees slightly apart.

Tighten up your back passage as though you are going to stop passing wind.

Then tighten the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine. Do these two together and you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.

Another way to think about this is by thinking of someone pursing their lips while drinking through a straw.”

Exercise set 1

Ask the patient to perform 5 quick muscle contractions (1 second hold followed by a 2 second rest).

Exercise set 2

Ask the patient to perform 10-20 sustained contractions of 8-10 seconds, followed by a 10 second relaxation period.

During exercise, the patient should not demonstrate abdominal activity or muscle activity at the buttocks and thighs. If the patient performs a Valsalva manoeuvre (straining down instead of pulling the muscles up and in) during exercise, provide additional information to correct their task performance.

Teach the patient to place a hand on the abdomen to detect abdominal muscle tension:

“Keep your tummy, buttocks and thighs relaxed while you do these exercises. Tensing your tummy muscles can work against bladder control because it can press on your bladder and increase pressure inside. This pushes urine out, rather than holding urine in.

To keep from straining down when you do a pelvic muscle contraction:

- breath out gently and keep your mouth open each time you tighten your muscles;
- rest a hand lightly on your abdomen
- if you feel your stomach pushing out against your hand, you are straining down.

When you are first learning it takes practice and concentration to exercise correctly, but it will get more automatic with time.”

Here are some other tips to help patients relax their abdominal and hip muscles:

- When you contract your pelvic floor muscles and exercise correctly, no one can tell you are exercising.
- Don't hold your breath while squeezing your muscles.
- Breath in and out through your mouth.
- Place your hands on your tummy to make sure you are not tightening the wrong muscles.
- Do not squeeze your buttocks together.
- Do not arch your back.
- Your buttocks should not lift up from the bed.

Encourage patients to check if they are doing the exercises correctly. You may like to use the following wording:

“If able you can check if you are doing the exercises properly.

Women

- Put your thumb or two fingers inside your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles move around your thumb/fingers.
- Check with a mirror. Hold a small mirror so that you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The skin between the anus and the vagina should move away from the mirror.

Men

- Put your fingers on the skin just behind the scrotum (balls). Try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles moving the skin away from your fingers.
- A correct contraction should cause the testicles to move back and the penis to lift up or twitch.”

During this set of contractions, also emphasise the importance of relaxing pelvic floor muscles completely between each contraction. Use the following phrases to encourage muscle relaxation:

“Contracting your muscles repeatedly will make them stronger, but relaxing the muscles is equally important. Relaxation allows blood and oxygen to get back into the muscles and prepare them for exercising. Allowing the muscles

to completely relax between squeezes also helps the muscle to build and 'bulk up' faster."

Additional tips:

- Remind the patient that these exercises are new for most people and that they will get better with practice.
- It takes time and practice to become skilful.
- Encourage persistence.
- Praise subject efforts.

Please document all activities undertaken with patients on the DAILY TREATMENT LOG for each patient.

Review

Review patient at weekly intervals using

- bladder diary
- log of exercises patient has done in the previous week.

Decide on exercise schedule for the following week and document this in the back of the Patient Information Booklet and in the nursing care plan.

Maintenance

Weekly progress reviews are an ideal time to discuss progress with patients and to provide support and encouragement to help motivate patients to continue with their schedule.