

Pelvic Floor and Continence

Many people with Aspergillosis have episodes of urinary incontinence. This may vary from occasionally leaking a few drops to emptying the full bladder in the most severe cases. Leakage is often exacerbated by periods of repeated coughing. The resources below explain how urinary incontinence occurs and offer advice on how to minimise your symptoms.

Pelvic floor problems can include:

- leaking of urine,
- leaking from bowels,
- difficulty controlling wind,
- urgent and frequent need to pass urine.

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor consists of layers of muscles and extends from the tail bone (at the back) to the pubic bone (at the front). The pelvic floor muscles support the womb, bladder and bowel. The urethra, vagina and rectum pass through the pelvic floor.

What causes pelvic floor weakness?

In Aspergillosis the pelvic floor can become weak as a result of persistent strain from activities such as repeated coughing.

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

What can you do about it?

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Studies have shown that various methods of training the pelvic floor muscles result in less leakage.

Men: <https://www.bladderandbowel.org/download/pelvic-floor-exercises-men/>

Women: <https://www.bladderandbowel.org/download/pelvic-floor-exercises-women/>

There are apps available (such as the Squeezy App) that can help prompt these exercises and guide you to do them correctly.

<https://www.blf.org.uk/technology-for-lung-health/squeezy-nhs-pelvic-floor-muscle-exercises-for-cf>

Where necessary a referral can be made to a specialist continence team who will be able to provide advice, assessment and treatment (e.g. pelvic floor exercises).

Controlled coughing and modifying your airway clearance technique may help to prevent or minimise leakage. 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 position.

“The Knack”

“The Knack” is a technique where you tighten and lift the pelvic floor muscles before coughing, huffing, sneezing etc to protect against leakage. It is very important that you are performing “the Knack” correctly and lifting the muscles, not pushing downwards. You may need the help of a specialist continence physiotherapist to do this. It is suggested that all people with chronic respiratory disease should practice “the Knack”, whether you leak or not.

Exercise

Exercise is important to maintain fitness and helps to keep your chest clear of secretions. High impact exercise such as jumping, skipping and running may cause leakage. Talk to your physiotherapist if you intend doing weight training and abdominal toning (sit ups) programmes to ensure you are following a balanced exercise programme.

Lifting

Try to avoid unnecessary strain on your pelvic floor muscles. If you have to lift in your job or daily routine, get advice about safe lifting and equipment to help.

Bladder problems

Don't reduce your fluid intake to try and reduce frequency; it may make your urine stronger which might cause more irritation of the bladder. Avoid fizzy and caffeinated drinks. To help with the urgency of needing to go to the toilet, sit down if you can, use your pelvic floor muscles to help the bladder relax and wait until the strong urge passes.

Relaxation

It is just as important to have pelvic floor muscles that can relax as it is for them to be strong. Increased stress can cause changes to your posture and breathing, and this can put more tension in all our muscles, our pelvic floor included. Practising some mindfulness techniques can help to improving our breathing techniques as well as relax our muscles. There are many apps available online that can help with this.

Further information about pelvic health can be found on the Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy website here:

<https://thepogp.co.uk/resources/booklets/>

Written by Specialist Physio Kim Driver and a women's health specialist physio Tamla Fox.

May 2021