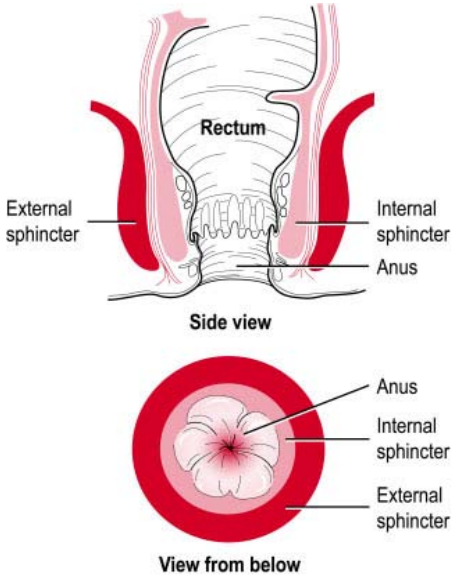
Sphincter Exercises for people with bowel control problems

Introduction

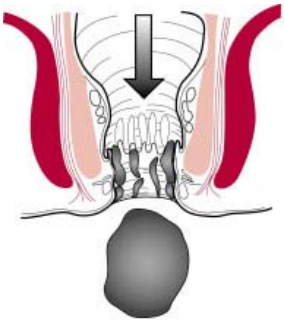
Sphincter exercises can help you to improve your bowel control. When done correctly, these exercises can build up and strengthen the muscles to help you to hold both gas and stool in the back passage.

Where are these muscles?

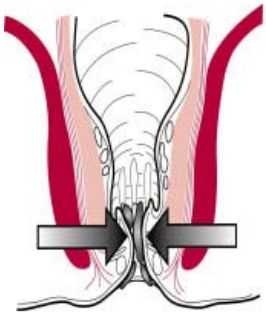
The back passage, or anus, has two rings of muscle around it (see diagram).



Either or both of these sphincter muscles can become weak. This may be because of childbirth, constipation and straining or general wear and tear. Sometimes there is no obvious reason why. If you have weak muscles and cannot squeeze enough to hang on you will feel urgency and leak gas, liquid or even solid stool.



Passing a stool



Muscle does not close completely thus trapping the stool in the anus

compassionate care

How can exercises help?

Exercises can strengthen these muscles so that they once again give support. This will improve your bowel control and improve or stop leakage of gas or stool. Like any other muscles in the body, the more you use and exercise them the stronger the sphincter muscles will be.

The inner ring is the internal sphincter; an involuntary muscle which should be closed at all times except when you are actually trying to open your bowels. This is normally automatic, you do not have to think about doing it.

The outer ring of muscle is the external sphincter, which is a voluntary muscle which you can tighten up to close it more firmly if you have urgency or diarrhoea.

Both muscles wrap right around the anus. When a stool comes into the rectum the internal sphincter relaxes and allows the stool to enter the top part of the anus. Very sensitive nerves in the anal canal can tell you if it is gas or stool waiting to come out. If it is stool you squeeze your external sphincter to stop it from coming straight out. This squeezing moves the stool back into the rectum, where it waits until you get to the toilet.

Practising your exercises

1. Sit, stand or lie with your knees slightly apart. Tighten and pull up the sphincter muscles as tightly as you can. Hold tightened for at least 5 seconds, and then relax for at least 10 seconds.

2. Next, pull the muscles up to about half of their maximum squeeze. See how long you can hold this for. Then relax for at least 10 seconds.

   Repeat at least 5 times. This will work on the endurance or staying power of your muscles.

3. Pull up the muscles as quickly and tightly as you can and then relax and then pull up again and see how many times you can do this before you get tired. Try for at least 5 quick pull-ups.

4. Do these exercises – 5 as hard as you can, 5 as long as you can and as many quick pull-ups as you can, at least 10 times every day.

5. As the muscles get stronger you will find that you can hold for longer than 5 seconds and that you can do more pull-ups each time without the muscle getting tired.

6. It takes time for exercise to make muscle stronger. You may need to exercise regularly for several months before the muscles gain their full strength.

Tips to help you

At first it is probably a good idea to set aside some time for these exercises and really concentrate on getting them right but quite soon they should become easy to do wherever you are. Nobody need know what you are doing!

Get into the habit of doing your exercises with things you do regularly; every time you touch water if you are a housewife, every time you answer the phone if you are at the office ... whatever you do often.

Learning to do the exercises

It is important to do the exercises in the right way and to check from time to time that you are still doing them correctly. Sit comfortably with your knees slightly apart. Now imagine that you are trying to stop yourself passing wind from the bowel. To do this you must squeeze the muscle around the back passage. Try squeezing and lifting that muscle as tightly as you can, as if you are really worried that you are about to leak. You should be able to feel the muscle move. Your buttocks, tummy and legs should not move much at all. You should be aware of the skin around the back passage tightening and being pulled up and away from your chair. Really try to feel this. You are now exercising your anal sphincter. You should not need to hold your breath when you tighten the muscles. Now imagine that the sphincter muscle is a lift. When you squeeze as tightly as you can your lift goes up to the 4th floor but you cannot hold it there for very long and it will not get you safely to the toilet as it will get tired very quickly. So now squeeze more gently, take your lift only up to the 2nd floor. Feel how much longer you can hold it than at the maximum squeeze.Repeat at least 5 times. This will work on the strength of your muscles.

- If you are unsure that you are exercising the right muscle, put a finger on the anus as you squeeze to check. You should feel a gentle lift and squeeze if you are exercising the right muscle. Or look at the area in a mirror – you should see the anus pucker up as you squeeze it.

- Use your muscles when you need them – pull up the muscles if you feel urgency and that you are about to leak but remember that you cannot hold your tightest squeeze for very long, so you are better to use a gentle squeeze that you can hold for longer. Your control will gradually improve.

- Watch your weight – extra weight puts extra strain on your muscles.

- Once you have regained control of your bowel, don't forget your exercises. Continue to do them a few times each day to ensure that the problem does not come back.

Do you have any questions?

This information sheet is designed to teach you how to exercise your anal sphincter to improve your bowel control. If you have any problems doing the exercises or if you do not understand any part of this information sheet ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist for help.

Do your exercises regularly. Have faith in them. You should begin to see good results in a few weeks.

Special Instructions

Bowel Dysfunction Department
Calderdale and Huddersfield Foundation Trust
Tel: 01484 355062

Please leave a message with contact details if there is no-one there to take your call.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Colorectal Specialist Nurses
Bowel Dysfunction Department
Calderdale and Huddersfield Foundation Trust

Telephone No: 01484 355062

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

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