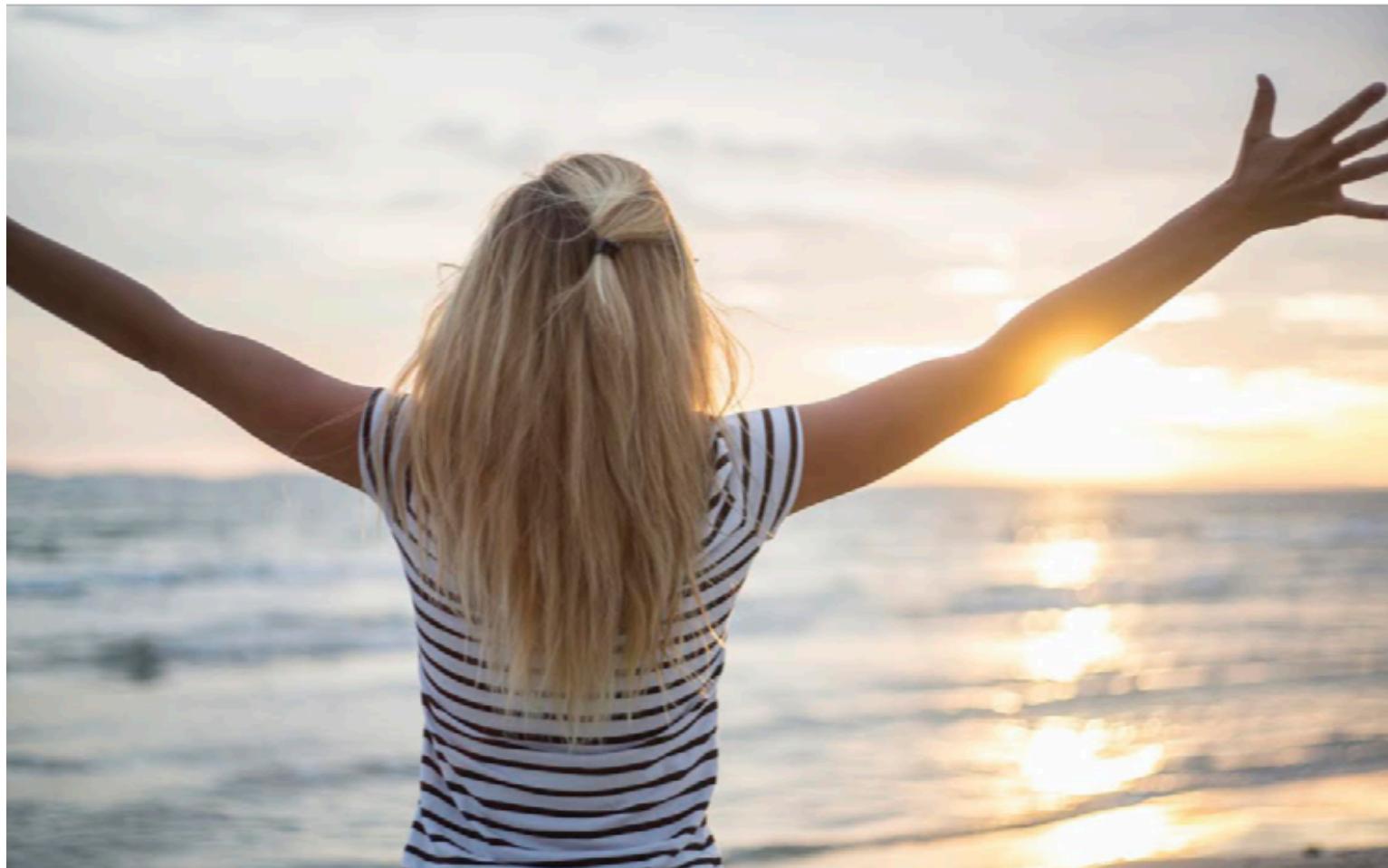




Beyond Health's Lifestyle Rituals for a Healthy Pelvic Floor



Because the pelvic floor muscles are involved in almost every functional body movement we make proper pelvic floor function is fundamental to overall musculoskeletal health and wellbeing. A healthy pelvic floor is essential in the prevention of incontinence from the bladder and bowel, pelvic organ prolapse, sexual dysfunction and poor pelvic stability.

The following guidelines are highly recommended as a preventative and maintenance approach to living with a healthy pelvic floor. While especially relevant post childbirth and for those experiencing any pelvic floor issues, they are important for all women through all walks of life.

1. Take Regular Exercise

Swimming, walking, cycling and light weights are all good forms of exercise for your pelvic floor muscles. Use good posture, exhale with every effort and draw up your pelvic floor during exercise to help reduce downward pressure.

If you experience or are at risk of developing pelvic floor problems and have not yet been checked by a Women's Health Physiotherapist then avoid high impact or high intensity exercise such as running, doing box jumps, burpees etc. that are causing leakage and could cause further damage. Sit-ups, crunches, full plank and heavy weights also put downward pressure on the pelvic floor and should also be avoided.

If you are experiencing problems during low-impact exercise then STOP exercise altogether and get checked by a Women's Health Physiotherapist.

2. Integrate pelvic floor exercises into your daily rituals

Pelvic floor exercises (often called kegel exercises) are simple pelvic exercises that strengthen the pelvic floor and are one of the most effective treatments for incontinence issues. They are also recommended as a healthy daily ritual especially relative to pregnancy and aging.

Try and incorporate the following pelvic floor exercises below into your daily routine. These can be done while lying in bed, brushing your teeth, enjoying a cup of tea or coffee, preparing meals, taking the tube or while walking. Multi-tasking at its best! Consider downloading an app that reminds you to perform your exercises. This may help motivate you and encourage good habit formation:

- Gently tighten the pelvic floor muscles by imagining you are trying to stop urine and wind at the same time
- Tighten and relax quickly 10 times in a row
- Tighten and hold for 10 seconds 10 times in a row whilst using proper breathing techniques:
 1. Breathe in then out
 2. Gently draw up through the pelvic floor
 3. Continue to breathe as you maintain contraction

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles when you feel you might be about to leak – pull up the muscles before you cough, sneeze, laugh or lift anything heavy. Your control will gradually improve. Exercising your pelvic floor should not show at all externally. You should not pull your tummy in excessively, squeeze your legs together, tighten your buttocks or hold your breath.

Performing these exercises once per day will maintain the pelvic floor strength you currently have. During pregnancy and for 6 months following childbirth this should be increased to 3 times per day. If you are experiencing any pelvic floor issues the frequency should also be increased.

We would not expect our teeth to look nice if we never brushed them or expect to have a flat stomach if we never exercised, so we can't expect our pelvic floor to just work without doing anything! It takes time for exercise to make muscles stronger. You are unlikely to notice any improvement for several weeks - so stick at it!

3. Prevent Constipation

Don't ignore constipation. Chronic constipation puts pressure on the pelvic floor.

The following advice may help prevent and alleviate constipation. If you continue to experience problems you should make an appointment with a women's health physiotherapist.

- By drinking more fluids and eating more fiber stools should be soft and easier to pass. At Beyondhealth we believe that a diet based on a diversity of fresh, seasonal and locally grown whole foods is the best approach for everyone. We promote the use of minimally processed food, and believe that home-prepared meals, shared and enjoyed with others, contribute greatly to physical and mental wellbeing.
- Some prescribed medicines may contribute to constipation. You may need to make allowances for this in your diet but please discuss with your doctor.
- Don't rely on laxatives. Try using natural products e.g. linseed, seeded fruit etc.
- Exercise helps to stimulate intestinal activity, thereby encouraging regular bowel habits.
- Eat breakfast straight away after getting up. This allows your gastrocolic reflex time to work so that you may be able to

empty your bowels before you leave the home.

- Don't delay going to the toilet once you have felt the urge. Give yourself time to open your bowels, relax, try not to rush.



4. Maintain a healthy weight

Extra weight puts additional strain on the pelvic floor muscles. Maintaining a normal BMI reduces musculoskeletal stress and is beneficial to all aspects of your health.

5. Use correct lifting techniques

Lengthen through spine, gently draw up through the pelvic floor. Tilt forward from hips. Bottom goes back as body goes forward, press through heel to push heel.