

OOPS! I'VE HAD A LITTLE ACCIDENT!

Words: Belinda Anderson

THE PELVIC FLOOR IS A MYSTERIOUS THING — ALL OF US HAVE ONE, INCLUDING MEN, AND LIKE ALL OUR MUSCLES, WE NEED TO USE IT OR LOSE IT AND RISK INCONTINENCE OR PROLAPSE.

As a Pilates Instructor, I am discovering more and more ladies who only become aware of the significance of the pelvic floor during pregnancy, after childbirth or after excessive weight gain - it is just something they were never taught to train and look after. That is until this area makes itself well-known with a little leakage mishap or full-blown incontinence!

It could be while laughing, coughing, sneezing, unable to hold on to a full bladder or attempting to do some exercises that they very quickly realise that one of the most important muscle groups in the body has been neglected and overlooked. Some choose to ignore the symptoms as they are too embarrassed to ask for help. There are others who have worked these muscles regularly and correctly when they were younger so they never had to face the hard work of trying to get them to work again, but for some who have always worked them, they become shocked after child birth because they don't feel they have the strength they once had.

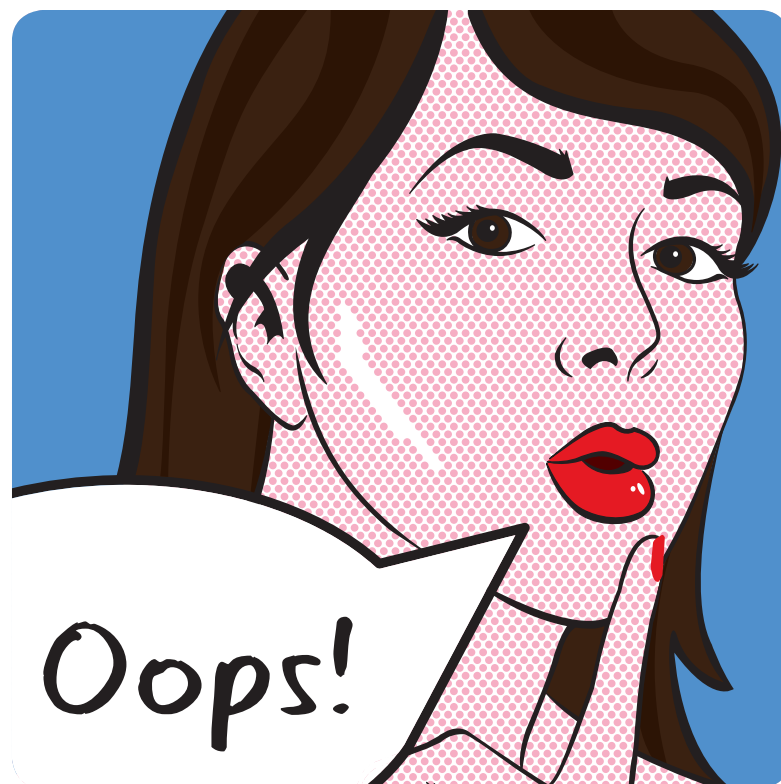
Like anything in life, prevention is better than cure but in saying that, it is never too late to change and learn.

The Pelvic floor muscles span the bottom of the pelvis that stretch like a hammock, running from the pubic bone to the tail bone (front to back) and from sit bone to sit bone (side to side). This hammock acts as a very vital support to our internal organs - it keeps everything in place in our abdominal cavity. These group of muscles also guide the baby down the birth canal during childbirth, they play an important role in bladder and bowel function and control, they significantly contribute to the enjoyment, or lack of, during sex.

If your hammock becomes saggy and loose, overstretched and weak it can lead to prolapse – a common condition where the bladder, uterus or bowel has nothing keeping it in place so it protrudes (sticks-out) of the vagina! Depending on the severity of the symptoms and the type of prolapse your Doctor may need to do surgery and then the recovery process begins.

To identify your pelvic floor muscles you may like to stop the flow of your urine next time you are going to the toilet. This is not a recommended regular exercise, it is simply for you to create some body awareness.

So, do whatever it is that works for you to get the pelvic floor activated and



working but ensure you are not clenching your buttocks, tensing/squeezing through your legs or holding your breath to try and achieve it. It is a deep internal feeling and no one will see this happening (it is not a tilt and tuck of the pelvis or a lift of the hips), so you can work your magic right in front of a group of people and they will be none the wiser!

Once you have found your muscles, you need to learn to develop strength and control using your breath; breathe in to prepare and then breathe out and visualise your internal organs being vacuumed up your spine as if travelling in a lift. By the end for your breathe out, you want to reach the top floor and then as you breathe in, gradually lower your organs back to the ground floor and repeat as many times as you wish. Once you advance, breathe in at the top and hold a little bit longer and then as you breathe out release slowly, breathe in at the bottom and relax and then get it going again - you want to aim to be able to hold it with control instead of a quick lift and release.

You can strengthen your pelvic floor muscles any and anytime and the only person that will know is you. Think to lift them up and inside you when you stop at every red light or when you hang the washing out or every time you check the mail box - get into the habit and I promise you will be laughing and star jumping again in no time without any mishaps!

Happy lifting!

Belinda Anderson is a Pilates and Meditation teacher. Her focus is on helping her clients to master skills and tools to implement into their daily life by connecting their mind, body and spirit. She is currently working on her first book "Living from the Inside Out".

