

Sphincter Exercises for People with Bowel Control Problems

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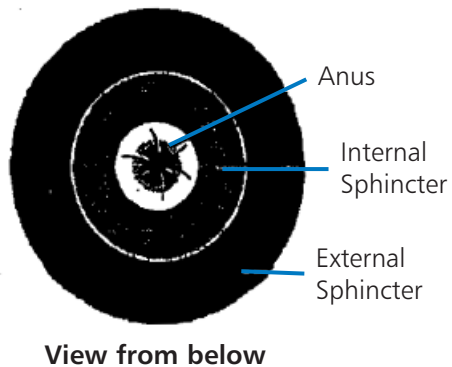
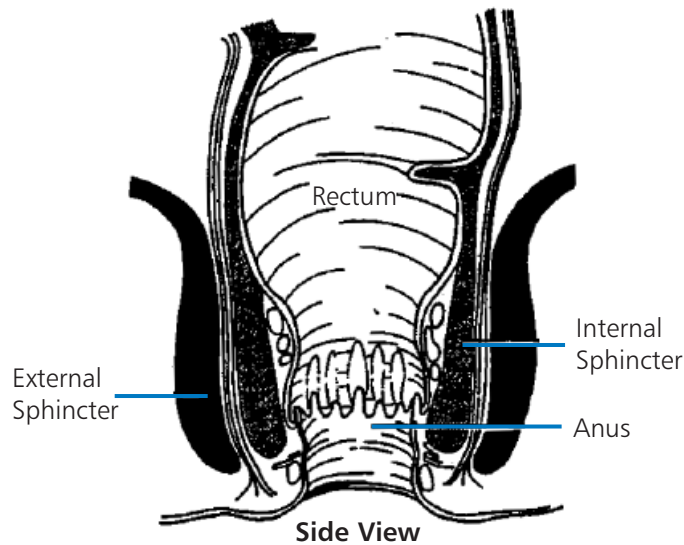
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Patient Information

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 hold both gas and stool in the back passage.

Where are these muscles?



Tips to help you

- 1 At first it is probably a good idea to set aside time for these exercises and really concentrate on getting them right. Quite soon they should become easy to do wherever you are.
- 2 Get into the habit of doing your exercises with things you do regularly e.g. when your hands are in water, every time you answer the phone, when you are in the office.
- 3 If you are unsure that you are squeezing 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 correctly. Or look at the area in a mirror – you should see the anus pucker up as you squeeze it.
- 4 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.
- 5 Watch your weight – extra weight puts extra strain on your muscles.
- 6 Once you have regained control of your bowel, don't forget your exercise, continue to do them a few times each day to ensure the problem does not come back.

Do you have any questions?

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

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

Special Instructions

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Practising your exercises

Depending on your initial condition you will be advised about your exercise regime and progression programme. Everyone is different so we start with what you can do now.

Now that you can do the basic pelvic floor exercise, you can use it to gradually strengthen your muscles.

How many to do:- Your starting block

To improve **strength** – start with what you can do now.

- a) How many seconds can you hold a maximum squeeze for? secs
b) How many times can you repeat this?

Make your rest time between each contraction the same or longer than the time each contraction is held.

To improve **stamina** or staying power

- Repeat a) & b) holding with half of the maximum squeeze secs
How many times you can repeat?

To improve the **quick** response

Squeeze and lift more firmly and let go quickly.

- How many of these quick squeezes can you do?

Now that you know what your own starting block is try to do this 4-6 times a day.

(For example 5 second max squeeze repeated 5 times
5 second 1/2 max squeeze repeated 5 times
5 quick squeezes)

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

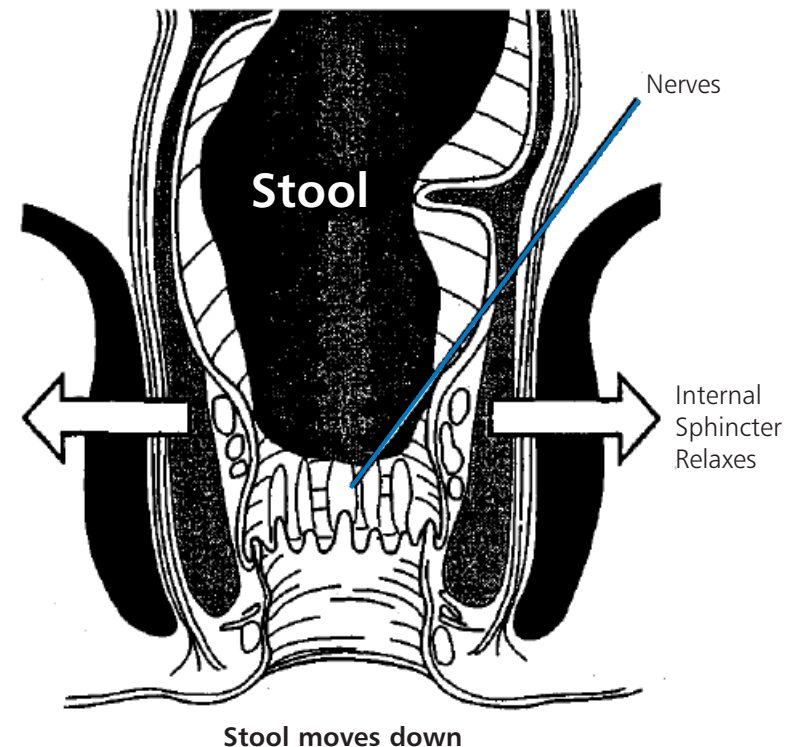
It takes time for exercise to make muscles stronger. You may need to exercise regularly for several months before the muscles gain their full strength.

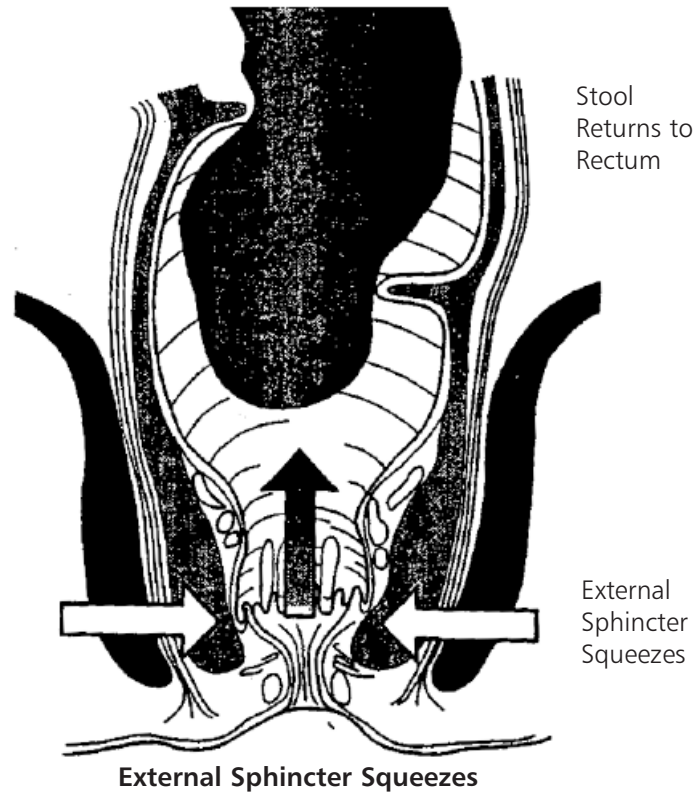
If you stop doing your exercises your muscles will weaken quickly and your symptoms will return.

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 don't have to think about 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 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 a stool you squeeze the 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.





Either or both of these sphincter muscles can become weak by:

- childbirth
- constipation and straining
- or general wear and tear

If you have weak muscles you cannot squeeze enough to hang on, you will experience urgency and may leak gas, liquid or even a solid stool.

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. As with any other muscle in the body the more you use and exercise them, the stronger the sphincter muscles will be.

Learning to do the exercises

Once you have attended for an initial assessment of your condition and problem, you will be taught how to exercise correctly.

It is important to do the exercises correctly and to check from time to time that you are still doing them correctly.

The following tips may help:-

1. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind from the bowel – tighten by squeezing and lifting the muscle around your back passage and feel the muscle move upwards. You should be aware of the skin around the back passage tightening and being pulled up and away from your chair seat.
2. Now imagine you are passing urine and tighten the muscles around the front passage, as if to stop mid stream.
3. Now do 1 and 2 together. Tighten around the back passage and think about moving the contraction forwards to include the front passage – imagine the squeeze and upward lift, which this will produce. Hold the contraction for a few moments then relax completely before trying again.

NOTE: when you squeeze as tightly as you can, you can only hold for a few moments, as the muscle will tire quickly. This will **not** help to get you safely to the toilet.

So now squeeze more gently, feel how much longer you can now hold for than at the maximum squeeze.

This **will** help you control the urgency on the way to the toilet.

Make sure you do not:

- tighten your buttocks
- breathe & hold
- tighten abdominal muscles

If you do any of these things you are NOT exercising correctly.