



LAUREN HILTON
PILATES STUDIO



PELVIC HEALTH GUIDE

A FREE GUIDE FOR OUR HAPPY MAMAS
PILATES FOR PREGNANCY CLIENTS

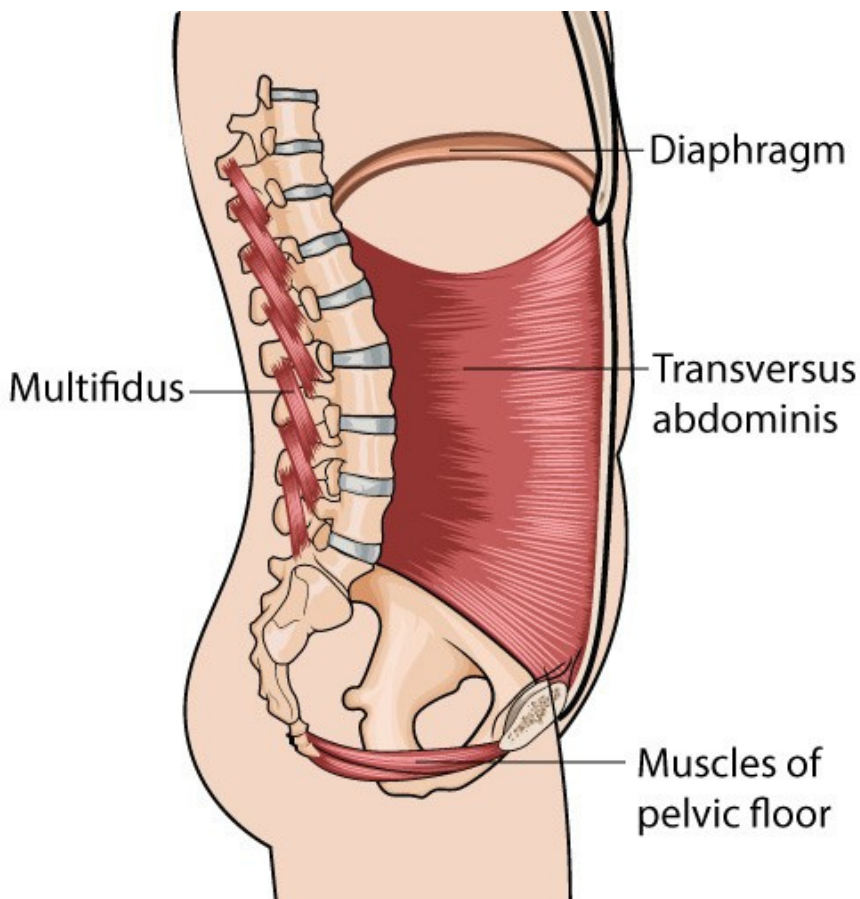
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YOUR PELVIC HEALTH

During pregnancy and beyond we want to have a pelvic floor that is both supple and strong. During your pregnancy we will help educate and empower you so that you know where your pelvic floor muscles are and how to use them.

In this mini-guide we'll give you a guided tour of the pelvic floor muscles and provide some exercises to practice throughout your pregnancy. Learning to connect to your pelvic floor now will help your post-natal recovery considerably.



PELVIC FLOOR - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Your pelvic floor is part of a group of muscles that are part of your core. They work with your abdominal muscles, spinal muscles and diaphragm as a support system for your spine by providing both strength and stability.

Your pelvic floor is deeply affected by pregnancy, labour and childbirth and needs a period of rehabilitation postpartum. This often gets overlooked and we begin to load the pelvic floor before it is ready. Pregnancy Pilates and post-natal Pilates will help to build the foundations to a healthy and strong pelvic floor as well as keeping you body mobile and help prevent aches and pains associated with the weight of a growing baby bump.



You could visualise your pelvic floor as a shelf supporting your internal organs - bladder, vagina, uterus and rectum.

In health and function the pelvic floor is supple and taut and has the ability to move through a full range of motion, relaxing and softening when needing to (i.e. going to the bathroom or during childbirth) and contracting appropriately when needing to (i.e. jumping or carrying).

The pelvic floor is designed to tighten with a sudden increase of abdominal pressure when coughing, sneezing, laughing and during quicker movements. Failure of this can cause leaking.

There are 3 layers of muscles within your pelvic floor; superficial, second and third layer. The third layer are the deepest and these are what lift and tighten during a kegal (pelvic floor lift).

Weakness in the pelvic floor muscles is directly related to back pain, bladder and bowel control problems, incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse and even diastasis recti.

Pregnancy, weight gain, postural changes, increased laxity in your ligaments, and decreased strength can affect the proper functioning of these muscles.

Not every woman needs to strengthen her pelvic floor. A pelvic floor that is overly tense or tight is also a dysfunction and can contribute to leaking and continence, back pain, bladder or yeast infections, painful sex and chronic pelvic pain.

A tense/overly tight pelvic floor can slow down the birth if your baby making for a longer and more difficult labour. During delivery, the pelvic floor should relax and stretch to thin out to allow the baby out, reducing trauma to the muscles.



The pelvic floor is made from fast and slow twitch muscles so here we have two pelvic floor exercises that you can practice at home which work both muscle fibers.

PELVIC ELEVATOR

Imagine your pelvic floor is a lift in a building. We have a ground floor (your pelvic floor at rest), levels one, two and three. There is also a basement floor just below the ground floor. I like to do this seated but you can slowly do it lying down as before or in any other position. The key again is to connect to the pelvic floor in as many different positions as possible.

Sit on a chair, feet hip width apart. Ensure you are sitting on the two sit bones with your spine aligned.

Breathe in, wide into your cylinder - front, back and sides.

Breathe out, connect to your centre, visualise closing the doors of the elevator. Imagine the sit bones drawing towards each other (without clenching the buttocks).

Breathe in, maintain that engagement.

Breathe out as the lift travels to the first floor.

Breathe in to pause this engagement.

Breathe out and take the lift to the second floor.

Breathe in, pause.

Breathe out and take the lift to the top floor, as far as you can without bracing.

Soften your shoulders and jaw and hold the connection.

Breathe in as you descend to the next floor slowly, then the next.

When you reach the ground floor, soften your muscles fully to lower to the basement floor. 'Open the doors' of the lift and release your pelvic muscles completely.

Repeat up to 5 times.



PELVIC FLOOR: LIFT AND PULSE

The pelvic floor needs both stamina and speed: it needs the fast-twitch capability for rapid response when you cough, laugh, sneeze or jump around.

This exercise is a good training drill to prepare your pelvic floor team for those 'emergencies' that require strength without a moment to lose. Once you have got this technique lying down you can practise it in a number of different positions : standing, sitting, lying. This will help to create the muscle memory (and the habit) for it to be more effective in your daily life.

Release and breathe in deeply into your belly, imagining your diaphragm taking up space within your centre.

Repeat and this time lift up and pulse 5 times.

Release completely, breathing in.

Repeat around 6 times, building up to 10 pulses if you can.

Try a slow draw up and hold and release slowly, do 10 times and then 10 quicker 'contract release', 'contract release' into your pelvic floor.

Aim for 3 times a day and you should see an overall improvement in your pelvic floor health (if you have a weak pelvic floor).

Repeat up to 5 times.



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