

A PELVIC HEALTH  
PHYSIOTHERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE

# Prepare Your Pelvic Floor for Birth



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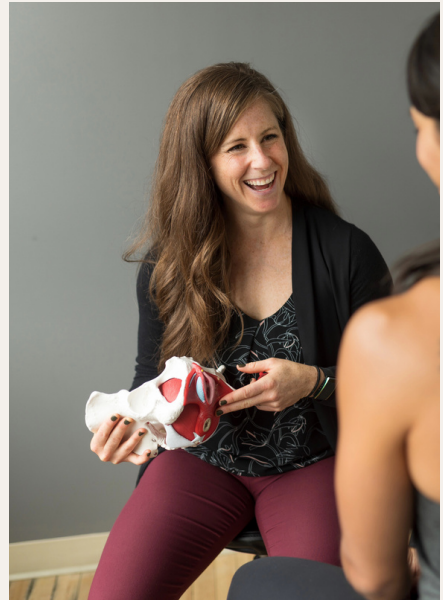
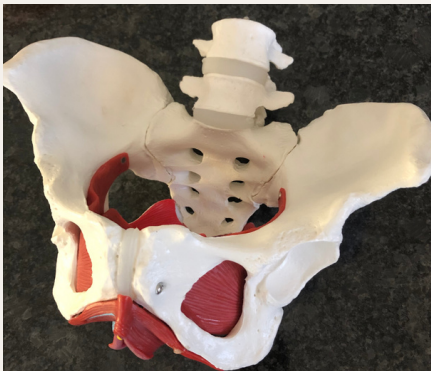
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## INTRODUCTION

# Hello, I'm an Orthopaedic and Pelvic Health Physiotherapist.

How many of you have heard that you should have a strong pelvic floor to “push” your baby out? I continue to hear this on a very frequent basis. While it’s important to keep your pelvic floor muscles strong by staying active during your pregnancy, this group of muscles do NOT push your baby out during labor. It is your uterus that will contract to push the baby down the vaginal canal and out of the pelvic floor, and the pelvic floor muscles actually need to be able to relax and lengthen to let the baby out. While this is a region of the body you may not have a good sense of connection with currently, you do have the ability to develop awareness and control of these muscles!



I truly believe that learning how to connect with and relax your pelvic floor muscles in preparation for birth can help you enter labor with confidence and a new degree of trust in your body.

*Brittany Klingmann*

# The Pelvic Floor Muscles in Pregnancy

## What is their role?

The pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that make up the bottom of the bowl of the pelvis. These muscles have many jobs:

1. Control of bowel and bladder
2. Support pelvic organs
3. Support the pelvis
4. Sexual functions including arousal and orgasm
5. Circulation

As you can imagine then, staying strong though pregnancy can be tremendously helpful. The 2019 Canadian Guidelines for Physical Activity throughout Pregnancy recommends, in the absence of any contraindications, that exercise should be prioritized. Accumulating at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity accumulated over a minimum of 3 days and preferably most days. Including both aerobic activity and resistance/strength exercise.

Exercise can challenge the pelvic floor muscles by keeping them strong and responsive through your pregnancy.

If you have any questions about how your exercise should change throughout pregnancy, a Pelvic Health Physiotherapist can discuss modifications to suit your body's needs.

Throughout the majority of your pregnancy it can be helpful to learn how to stay connected to and use these deep pelvic muscles. As your body grows and changes, it can also feel harder to connect with and use the abdominal muscles, and you may experience heaviness or pressure in your vulvar region. But staying connected to this group of muscles can help you stay confident in your changing body.

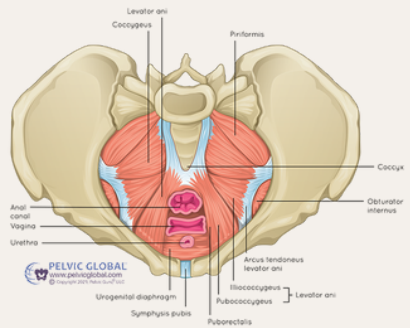


# Getting to know your Pelvic Floor

## The Pelvic Floor Muscles

As discussed above, these muscle make up the bottom of the bowl of the pelvis. They are very cool because they operate reflexively without our conscious awareness most of the time. They tighten when we cough or sneeze so we don't leak urine, they relax so we can empty our bowel or bladder, and they act as a trampoline constantly responding to our bodies needs during exercise.

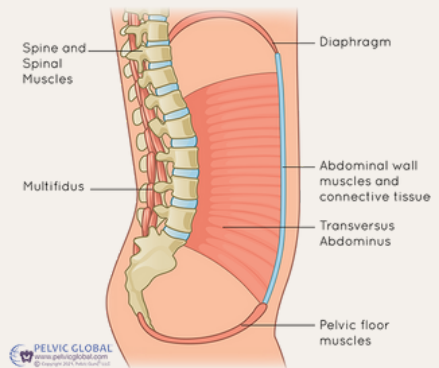
Sometimes this reflexive rhythm can be disrupted, but we can consciously become aware of these muscles and this can help us through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum recovery.



## The Deep Core

While the pelvic floor muscles make up the bottom of the pelvis, they don't work in isolation. They are part of a group of muscles that make up our deep core. Learning to connect with this group can help you develop awareness of contracting (doing kegels), as well as relaxing (reverse kegels).

As you approach the end of your pregnancy, it will become more important to emphasize the relaxing piece.



# Things you can do to Prepare



## Thoracic Mobility

The diaphragm, the main breathing muscle, is a dome-shaped muscle that attaches to the ribs. During pregnancy, the lower rib cage needs to widen to make room for your growing baby. Staying mobile through the mid-back region can help your body make these changes, and also help relax your pelvic floor muscles. There are many variations of thoracic mobility movements.



## Hip and Pelvic Openers

In general, think...HAPPY HIPS = HAPPY PELVIC FLOOR.

Some of the muscles that make up the pelvic floor also connect with the hip, so keeping the hips happy is a great way of keeping the pelvic floor muscles happy.



You want to stay mobile and strong through the hips in pregnancy. Many strength and mobility exercise variations exist. A couple of examples shown here: Hip CARS and Happy Baby pose can feel great!

# Things you can do to Prepare, continued.

## Perineal Massage

One technique that has been shown to reduce the severity of tearing is Perineal Massage. It can be taught a few different ways. I believe it is very helpful, as it can be a tool for building familiarity with those muscles. Encountering a sensation that you may deem as uncomfortable - but rather than pulling away from this and tensing the muscles, learning how to release tension and relax. Seeing a Pelvic Health Physiotherapist in your area for a prenatal appointment can be a great way to learn this technique. Generally, it is not recommended to start perineal massage before 34 weeks of gestation.



# Feeling ready for what is to come

## **What about feeling prepared for after birth?**

Another advantage of seeing a Pelvic Health Physiotherapist in the prenatal period is becoming informed about what to expect postpartum.

Having conversations around normal changes in bowel or bladder control in the early days/weeks, can bring piece of mind.

Learning what you can do right from Day 1 with regards to re-connecting with your pelvic floor muscles and abdominals.

Learning strategies for supporting your body and promoting an optimal environment for healing is critical, whether the final outcome of birth was a vaginal delivery, or a c-section delivery.

The internet can be filled with a lot of fear based messaging, or include a long list of DO'S OR DON'TS which can feel overwhelming.

I hope this resource can be a source of evidence-informed information which helps empower you to keep active during your pregnancy, feel supported in learning to be in control of your own pelvic floor muscles in birth, and expedite your recovery.

I wish you all the best in this exciting journey. There are many ways to learn how to connect with and build trust in your body in preparation for birth, but don't think of this as your finish line. Think of it as the start of a new beginning. You now have the foundations to begin with your postpartum recovery. Be sure to make YOU a priority during this next phase as well!

