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# Anal sphincter exercises for men

## Introduction

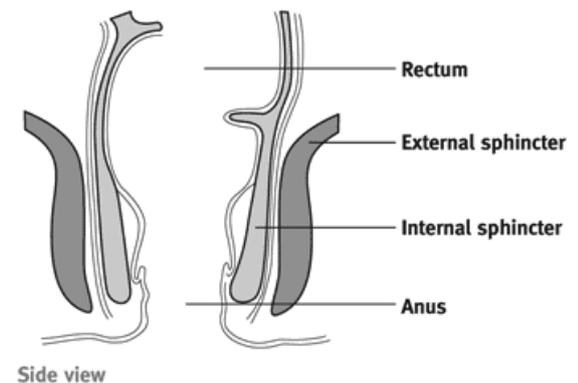
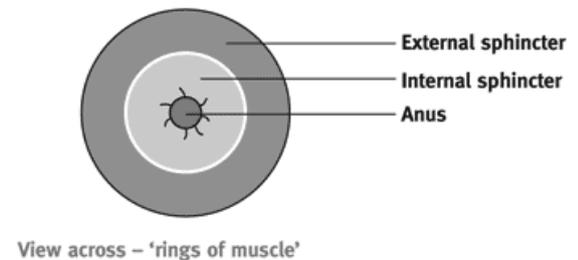
This leaflet has been designed to help you exercise your sphincter muscles. Sphincter exercises can help you to reduce leakage from the bowel. These exercises are also beneficial for patients who are due to have a colostomy or ileostomy (stoma) reversal operation. When done correctly, these exercises can build up and strengthen the muscles to help you hold both gas and stool in the back passage.

## Where are these muscles?

The back passage or anus has two rings of muscle around it (see Figure 1)

The internal sphincter is the inner ring of muscle which normally stays shut at all times until you actually need to empty your bowels when it should automatically open.

The external sphincter muscle is the outer ring of muscle which you can squeeze more tightly when you need to, for example, when you have urgency or diarrhoea.



Side view  
**Figure 1:**

These muscles can get weak after regular episodes of constipation or straining, normal aging or because of lack of use such as while a stoma is in place. If you have weak muscles you may leak gas, liquid or solid stools.

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Department

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If the muscles are damaged or weak, they may not close straight away or completely after you have been to the toilet. This often makes it difficult to wipe clean, and you may find that you also leak during exercise, lifting heavy weights or when you walk a long distance. Some people also find that a small amount of stool is passed with gas.

## How can exercises help?

The internal sphincter, which is most often the problem relating to leakage, cannot be strengthened by exercise. It is an involuntary muscle, which cannot be controlled by our body.

It is the external sphincter muscle that you can exercise. The aim is to exercise this muscle enough to make it thicker and stronger so that it gives more support and may compress the internal muscles to prevent leakage. Speeding up the reaction of this muscle may also help with gas control.

Like any other muscle in the body, the more you use and exercise it, the stronger the sphincter muscle will become. However, this will be hard work and often takes several months to be effective.

## How to exercise your sphincter muscles?

Sit comfortably with your knees apart. Imagine you are trying to stop passing wind and at the same time try to stop the flow of urine midstream. You should feel your scrotum (testicles) lift as you do this. Hold this for as many seconds as you can (up to a maximum of 10 seconds). At the end of the hold there should have a feeling of 'letting go'.

It is easy to use the wrong muscles. Try not to strongly pull in your tummy, squeeze your legs together, clench your buttocks or hold your breath.

You can check that you are doing the exercises correctly by gently resting a couple of fingertips on the outside of the back passage. You should only feel a squeeze at your fingertips not in your buttock muscles. Please remember to wash your hands afterwards.

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## How often and how many?

To strengthen the muscles you need to do 24 exercises a day. To avoid over tiring the muscle, only 8 holds should be performed at a time with at least 5 seconds rest in between each hold.

So try doing 8 holds 3 times per day.

## Any other tips?

Use your muscles when you need them – pull up the muscles if you feel that you are about to leak.

This can be more effective if you do a more gentle squeeze that you can hold for longer until the urge passes.

Try and keep to your correct weight as extra weight will put more strain on the muscles.

See [www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/physio/health](http://www.gloshospitals.nhs.uk/physio/health) for more details. Remember, you can practice these exercises wherever you are, nobody need know what you are doing!

## How will I know if I am getting better?

The sphincter exercises should give best results with regularly exercising them within 6 months.

## Contact information

If you have any problems or you do not understand any part of this information leaflet please contact your local continence physiotherapist:

### Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 2345

### Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8303

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