



# ATHLETE PELVIC FLOOR HEALTH



## PELVIC HEALTH FOR PREGNANT AND POST-NATAL ATHLETES

Looking after your pelvic floor whilst pregnant and in the post-natal period is important for long term pelvic health.

Performing pelvic floor muscle training exercises during pregnancy may prevent the development of pelvic floor symptoms during pregnancy and the post-natal period.

**MYTH:** Women who regularly complete pelvic floor muscle exercises during pregnancy have a more difficult childbirth.

**FACT:** Regular low to moderate exercise during pregnancy (including pelvic floor muscle training) **does not** increase the risk of delivery complications and may result in shorter labour

Pregnancy and vaginal birth are risk factors for developing pelvic floor disorders. Symptoms of pelvic floor disorders include losing control of your bowel or bladder, heaviness or bulging in the vagina, pelvic pain and painful sex.

Like a sports injury, caring for you pelvic floor in the early post-natal period is important for recovery. After vaginal birth the pelvic floor may continue to heal and recover for between four months and one year.

Pelvic floor muscle training can be commenced within a few days of giving birth. To allow tissue healing, exercise should focus on pelvic floor muscle training and low-impact activities for at least 3 months after vaginal birth, or 6 weeks after caesarean delivery.

Before returning to high-impact strenuous activities it is important that your pelvic floor muscles have regained adequate strength, coordination and endurance. Assessment by a pelvic floor physiotherapist can guide a pelvic floor safe return to training and competition.

After birth, and as you return to training, if you experience any symptoms of a pelvic floor disorder, tell a member of your performance and support staff or a health professional.

Pelvic floor muscle training is effective for reducing and curing the symptoms of urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse after birth. It may also help women who have difficulty controlling their bowel or problems with sexual function.

It can be difficult to correctly contract the pelvic floor muscles after childbirth. A pelvic floor physiotherapist can assess and provide feedback to ensure pelvic floor muscle contraction is being performed correctly. They can also provide advice on other strategies to manage pelvic floor symptoms.

**You don't have to suffer in silence. Telling a member of your performance and support staff, or a health professional about your symptoms will allow them to recommend an appropriate treatment plan.**

**For more information visit [ais.gov.au/fphi](https://ais.gov.au/fphi)**