

# YOUR GUIDE TO AN ACTIVE MENOPAUSE

Helping you to get and  
stay active during  
menopause



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# WELCOME TO ACTIVE MENOPAUSE

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With symptoms ranging from hot flushes to anxiety – it can be hard to feel your best during the menopause. But evidence shows that physical activity can help women manage and stay in control of their symptoms.

We can therefore view menopause as a significant opportunity to re-engage with physical activity, bringing you greater health, happiness and wellbeing from the physical, mental and social benefits that leading an active life brings.

Whilst 'menopause' itself refers to the day after which you haven't had a period for 12 consecutive months, 'Your Guide to an Active Menopause' is a resource for women at all stages of their menopause journey, including those experiencing symptoms of early menopause, perimenopause, and postmenopause.

This guide will help you to get started and find what works for you. It will cover the three main types of physical activity for managing menopausal symptoms: aerobic activity, strength and resistance activity, and pelvic health exercises, taking you through the key information, top tips and instructional 'how-tos'.

## BEFORE YOU START

Check out our list of physical activity tips and tricks:

- Always start with something that you enjoy
- If you struggle to find time, can you break up a longer activity into short bursts throughout the day e.g. whilst you're brushing your teeth, can you do 10 calf raises?
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing. Layers are good so that you can adjust your temperature if you feel hot or get hot flushes
- If you get hot flushes, try and plan your activity within the cooler morning and evening hours during warmer months. Generally, 11am-3pm is considered the hottest part of the day. Carrying a water bottle and bringing a hand-fan with you are other good ways to manage hot flushes
- Menopausal joint pain can be worse in the morning – try gentle stretching or yoga to combat this or consider afternoon activity instead
- If you suffer from urinary leakage, make sure you empty your bladder before exercising and avoid caffeine until after you have finished
- If you are struggling to sleep due to menopausal symptoms, exercising 2-3 hours before bed is best to give you enough time to wind down

You can also visit our Active Menopause page for more information and support.



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[www.active-together.org/activemenopause](http://www.active-together.org/activemenopause)

# TAKING PART IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, EXERCISE & SPORT

You're performing the exercises, sport and activity suggested and linked from this guide at your own risk.

Whilst taking part in physical activity and sport, participants should ensure they take part at a level which is appropriate to them and their health and are responsible for ensuring they check the credentials and health and safety requirements for each activity.

It is recommended that participants follow the Chief Medical Officers' Guidelines for physical activity. Participants will choose to utilise these links and take part in activities at their own risk.

If you're unsure about your ability, it might be wise to start gradually and build up. Please feel free to refer to our Physical Activity Guidelines when determining the level of activity appropriate to you.

Make sure you warm up and cool down to prevent injury, and make sure you keep hydrated.

If you have any uncontrolled health conditions, or experience any symptoms such as chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or fainting during activity normally, please see your GP prior to starting any new exercise regime.

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## HOW MUCH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SHOULD WE ALL BE DOING?

Find out how much physical activity you should be doing, as well as top tips and activity suggestions.

Physical Activity Guidelines:



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or visit

[www.active-together.org/movingmore](http://www.active-together.org/movingmore)



# QR CODES

Alongside web addresses, throughout this guide you will find QR codes like the below. Using a camera on your mobile device, hover over these codes and follow the pop-up link which will direct you to the relevant webpage for more information.

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[www.active-together.org/about](http://www.active-together.org/about)

# ACCESSIBILITY

Active Together is fully committed to accessibility in all of our services.

If you require resources in an alternative version or language, please contact us.

For more information, please visit:

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# AEROBIC ACTIVITY

## WHAT IS AEROBIC ACTIVITY?

Aerobic activities generally get your body moving for a prolonged period of time, they make you feel warmer and breathe faster.



### HOW CAN AEROBIC ACTIVITY HELP MANAGE MY SYMPTOMS?

During and after the menopause, a woman's body gradually produces less oestrogen than it used to. Oestrogen protects your heart by keeping your blood vessels relaxed and open, which keeps cholesterol from building up in your arteries and helps to regulate your blood pressure.

Low oestrogen can increase cholesterol levels and blood pressure. This means that, after the menopause, you are at an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Aerobic exercise is important as it reduces cholesterol and blood pressure, maintaining good heart health and reducing this risk.

As well, a lot of women ask, "Will I gain weight when I experience menopause?". Whilst changes in your hormone levels may cause you to gain weight, regular aerobic exercise can increase energy expenditure, which helps with weight management.

Aerobic exercise has also been shown to improve sleep quality, reduce depression and anxiety, reduce joint pain, improve sexual function, reduce vaginal dryness, and reduce the severity and/or frequency of hot flushes.

### WHAT COUNTS AS AEROBIC ACTIVITY?

Examples include:

- Running
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Brisk walking
- Zumba
- Dancing
- High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)

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### ACTIVITIES YOU MIGHT NOT THINK COUNT

Examples include:

- Gardening
- Hoovering
- Mowing the lawn
- Carrying the shopping
- Taking the stairs

# STRENGTH & RESISTANCE ACTIVITY

## WHAT IS STRENGTH & RESISTANCE ACTIVITY?



Strength and resistance activity (also known as strength training or weight training) is any form of activity where you pull or lift against a resistance, including your body weight, gravity, bands, machines, or free weights such as dumbbells.

### HOW CAN STRENGTH & RESISTANCE ACTIVITY HELP MANAGE MY SYMPTOMS?

The decline in oestrogen production that menopausal women experience can affect the amount of calcium in your bones. This can decrease your bone density, leading to a condition known as osteoporosis. It can also make you more susceptible to hip, spine, and other bone fractures. Many women experience increased bone density loss in the first few years after their last menstrual period.

Regular physical activity, particularly weight bearing and resistance exercise, can maintain bone density, preventing osteoporosis and the risk of fractures.

Regular resistance exercise also helps to maintain muscle mass and lower fat mass, which can be especially important during and after the menopause, when a reduction in oestrogen levels causes fat to accumulate around the waist.

Other benefits of resistance exercise include improved heart health, improved joint pain and improved sexual function and satisfaction.

### HOW MUCH SHOULD WE BE DOING?

The recommended amount of strength and resistance activity for adults is at least 2 days per week.

Remember, time spent doing strength and resistance activity does not count towards your recommended 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activities.

Resistance exercises should be performed on non-consecutive days. Start with 2-3 sets of 8-12 reps for each exercise, and a 2-3 minute rest between sets. Good form is crucial. Remember - focus on your breathing, exhale on exertion. Always seek the help of a professional if you are unsure.

### UNDERSTANDING THE KEY TERMS

**Reps** (repetitions) are the action of completing one strength exercise, such as 1 squat.

**Sets** are collections of reps.

**Rest intervals** between sets are crucial for allowing the muscles to recover.

### TOP TIP!

Aim to lift and lower the weight in a controlled manner, do not rush the movements. In general, the final 2 reps should feel hard to complete, but you should still be able to maintain good form so that it feels like an 8 out of 10 difficulty (where 0 = no effort and 10 = hardest possible effort). Gradually start to increase the amount of weight lifted, to give the muscles an opportunity to adapt and get stronger – this is called '**progressive overload**'.

# YOUR GUIDE TO STRENGTH & RESISTANCE ACTIVITY

Below are some exercises to try at home or in the gym. These exercises focus on strengthening the main muscles in your lower body, upper body and core. Each exercise has a 'progression', which you should attempt once you are comfortable with the fundamental movement. Progress exercises at your own pace and seek the advice of a professional if you are unsure.

## LOWER BODY

### SQUAT

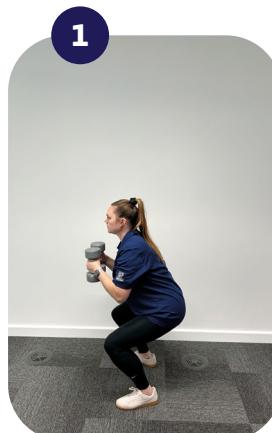
- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, feet facing forwards and hands on your hips
- Bend your knees to squat down, ensuring your knees do not move inwards during movement, or pass your toes
- Keep your back straight and chest up, always look forwards
- Squat only to a depth you are comfortable with [you can put two thin objects such as weight plates or a thin book under both heels to make the squat easier]
- Push strongly through your heels to the upright starting position



### PROGRESSION:

### SQUAT WITH OVERHEAD PRESS

Perform a squat as above, but hold a dumbbell or weighted item in each hand. With each repetition, keep your core tight and push the weights straight up in the air above your head, then come back to the starting position.



# PLIÉ SQUAT

- Stand with your feet wider than shoulder distance and toes pointed out at 45°.
- Bend your knees with your back straight and core tight, then come back to the starting position.



## PROGRESSION:

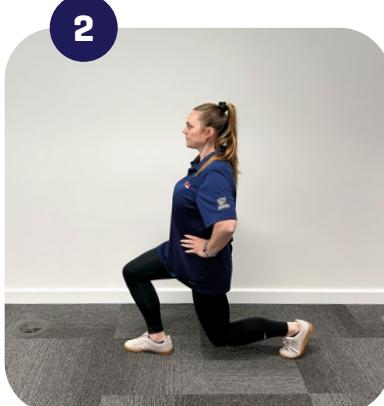
### PLIE SQUAT WITH WEIGHT

- Add in one dumbbell or weighted item held in both hands.



# REVERSE LUNGE

- With your feet hip-width apart and your hands on your hips, take a step backward with your left foot, with both your feet pointing forward.
- Lower your hips so that your thigh becomes parallel with the floor and your right knee is positioned over your ankle. Your right knee should be bent at 90°. If it is more comfortable, bring your right heel slightly off the ground.
- Press the ball of your left foot into the ground and bring your left foot forward into the starting position.
- Repeat on the opposite side. You can alternate between legs or do one leg at a time.



## PROGRESSION: REVERSE LUNGE WITH WEIGHT

- Add weights in each hand. This exercise can also be performed with the back leg on a small step, which also challenges your balance.



## HIP HINGE

- With feet shoulder width apart and toes pointed forward, shift your weight to your heels and push your hips back whilst you hinge forward at the hips with knees slightly bent.
- Hands can be across your chest or on your hips.
- Lower your chest until it is parallel to the floor and hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Slowly come back up by pushing your hips forward and squeezing your buttock muscles.



## PROGRESSION: SINGLE LEG DEADLIFT

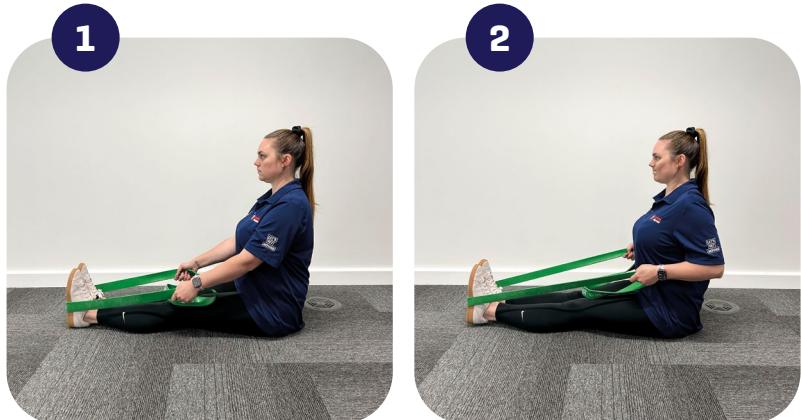
- Start with your arms stretched out for additional balance and support.
- Perform the movement as above but on one leg, by straightening the back leg and maintaining a flat back with hips and shoulders pointing forwards.



# UPPER BODY

## SEATED ROW WITH RESISTANCE BAND

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended and loop a resistance band around your feet, holding an end in each hand.
- Sit upright and pull your elbows back, imagining you are squeezing a tennis ball between your shoulder blades.



### PROGRESSION:

## SEATED ROW WITH DUMBBELLS

As above but with dumbbells. You can progressively increase the weight you use. You could also use a higher resistance band.



# WALL PUSH UP

- Stand facing the wall.
- Place your hands in front of you against the wall just slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Your arms should be straight, but elbows are not locked. Align your feet so that your arms and body are completely straight.
- Bend your elbows to slowly lower your chest to the wall whilst inhaling. Keep your body straight and rigid throughout the movement with elbows close to your body.
- Push your body away from the wall until your elbows are extended, but not locked. Exhale as you push up.



## PROGRESSION: STANDARD PUSH UP

- Start on the floor on all fours, positioning your hands slightly wider than your shoulders. Keep your elbows slightly bent.
- Extend your back legs so you are balanced on your hands and toes, feet hip-width apart.
- Tighten your core by pulling your belly button towards your spine.
- Ensure your neck stays neutral in line with your spine, don't dip the head.
- Inhale as you slowly bend your elbows and lower yourself to the floor, until your elbows are at a 90° angle.
- Exhale whilst contracting your chest muscles and push back up through your hands to the starting position and repeat.



# PLANK

- Get into a push-up position but instead rest your weight on your forearms.
- Tighten your core by pulling your belly button towards your spine, clench your buttock muscles and keep your body straight from head to heels.
- Hold as long as you can. Aim to increase the time you can hold it for each time.



## PROGRESSION: UP DOWN PLANK

- Begin in a push up position. Bend your left arm, place your left elbow on the mat and then bend your right arm and place your right elbow on the mat.
- Place your left hand on the mat, straighten your left arm and then place your right hand on the mat and straight your right arm.
- Switch sides and repeat this movement.



## PELVIC BRIDGE

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, with both hands resting by your side, palms facing down.
- Have your feet a comfortable distance away from your buttocks.
- Gently contract your abdominal (core) and pelvic floor muscles and inhale. Your pelvic floor muscles are the muscles you can feel work if you try to stop the flow of urine when you go to the toilet (it's not recommended that you regularly stop the flow of urine midstream as it can be harmful to your bladder).
- Maintain this abdominal contraction throughout the exercise.
- Exhale as you lift your hips up off the floor and press down into your feet through your heels, raising your hips to create a straight line from your knees to your shoulders. Make sure you don't lift too high and cause hyperextension (arching) in your lower back.
- Pause at the top for 2 seconds as you inhale and then exhale to return to the floor.



## PROGRESSION:

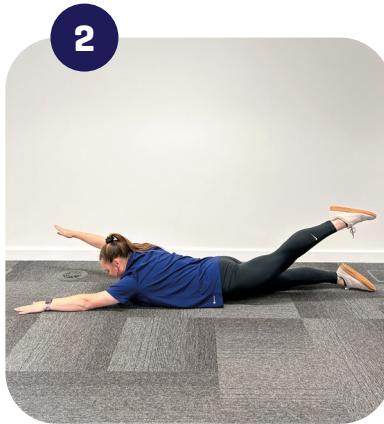
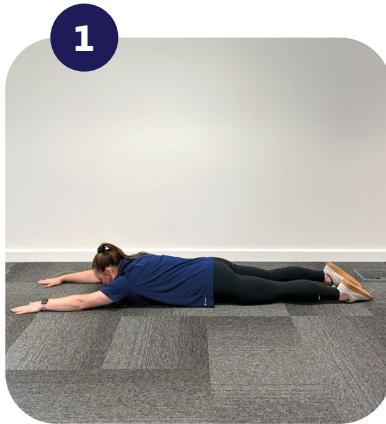
## SINGLE LEG PELVIC BRIDGE

- As above, but start with the right knee bent, and the left raised off the floor, with your arms by your side and palms facing down.
- Inhale, squeeze your buttock muscles and push your right foot into the ground. Then exhale as you push your hips towards the ceiling until your left leg is in line with your hips and body.
- Pause at the top of the movement, then slowly return to starting position.
- Remember to repeat the set of exercises on the opposite leg.



# SUPERMAN

- Lie face down with your arms and legs outstretched and your forehead on the mat, with your neck in a neutral position (not looking up).
- Keeping your head in a neutral position, lift your right arm and left leg simultaneously, as well as your upper back off the ground, until your arm and leg are about 6 inches off the floor.
- Squeeze your buttock, core and back muscles as you perform this movement.
- Pause at the top and then slowly come down. Repeat on the opposite arm and leg.
- Ensure you breathe throughout the exercise.



## PROGRESSION:

### KNEELING SUPERMAN

- Kneel on all fours with your knees under your hips and hands placed beneath your shoulders.
- Keeping your head in a neutral position, extend your right arm in front of your body at the same time as you extend your left leg out behind your body, kneeling on the right leg.
- Lower your right arm and left leg back to the ground and repeat on the other side. This exercise is great for also improving your balance.



# IMPACT EXERCISE

During and after the menopause, the decline in oestrogen causes an increased risk of osteoporosis (weak bones), as women lose bone density rapidly in the first few years after the menopause. Women who experience early menopause (before the age of 45) or who have had their ovaries removed have an increased risk.

Some types of physical activity (e.g. swimming and cycling), although excellent for our overall health, do not provide enough loading to protect our bones long term. Therefore, strength and resistance activity, in particular impact exercises, are some of the best ways to maintain bone mineral density during and after the menopause. The recommended amount of strength and resistance/impact activity for adults is at least 2 days per week, especially if you have risk factors for developing osteoporosis (see table below).



## RISK FACTORS FOR OSTEOPOROSIS

RISK FACTORS YOU CAN CHANGE	RISK FACTORS YOU CAN'T CHANGE	OTHER RISK FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not exercising regularly</li><li>Low body mass index (BMI)</li><li>Smoking</li><li>Excessive alcohol consumption</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Genetics - if you have a strong family history of osteoporosis (particularly a hip fracture in a parent)</li><li>Age</li><li>Female</li><li>Previous osteoporotic fracture</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Certain medications including steroids, antiepilepsy medications, and some breast cancer treatments</li><li>Some chronic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, hyperthyroidism, Crohn's disease and inflammatory or hormone-related conditions</li></ul>

## EXAMPLES OF IMPACT EXERCISES

- Running
- Dancing
- Strength and resistance exercises shown in the previous section
- An alternative series of example impact and resistance exercises can be found on the Royal Osteoporosis Society



SCAN ME

Visit:

[www.theros.org.uk/blog/new-exercise-for-bone-health-films-muscle-strengthening](http://www.theros.org.uk/blog/new-exercise-for-bone-health-films-muscle-strengthening)

# DESK-BASED EXERCISES

Prolonged periods of sitting are associated with negative health consequences such as the development of diabetes, obesity and heart disease. It can also lead to joint pain, especially in the hips, back and neck, which is more common during the menopause due to a decline in oestrogen, which usually helps to protect the joints from inflammation and 'wear and tear'. Doing the following exercises a few times a day at home or at work will help to break up any prolonged periods of sitting:

## SIT TO STAND

- Sit towards the front of the chair [ideally one without wheels] with a neutral spine and your hands on your hips.
- Ensure your feet are flat on the floor about shoulder width apart.
- Lean forward and shift your weight forward to stand up.
- Hold the movement at the top for a second.
- Sit down slowly whilst tightening your core.



## KNEE EXTENSION

- Sit towards the middle of your chair with a neutral spine.
- Lift one leg up, extending at the knee.
- Hold the leg straight at the top, squeezing your thigh muscles before lowering your leg down slowly.
- Repeat on the other side.



# CALF RAISES

- Stand with feet hip-width apart and toes pointing forward.
- Raise your heels off the floor and squeeze your calves.
- Hold it at the top for a second then slowly lower yourself down.
- You can also do this movement on one leg to increase the resistance and to also improve your balance.



# SEATED TWIST

- Sit towards the front of the chair (ideally one without wheels) with a neutral spine.
- Sit facing forward then place your right hand on your left knee and twist your torso so that you are looking over your left shoulder.
- If possible, place your left hand on the backrest to get a deeper stretch. Hold in this position for 1-2 seconds.
- Return to the centre and complete on the opposite side.



# CRESCENT MOON STRETCH

- Sit towards the front of the chair (ideally one without wheels) with a neutral spine.
- Put your hands together with your fingers pointing upward and your arms outstretched above your head. You should slightly reach upwards and feel an initial stretch.
- Keeping your back straight, gently lean to the left. You should be able to feel a stretch along your side and ribs.
- Slowly come to the centre and repeat on the other side.



## KEEPING YOURSELF HEALTHY AT WORK:

- Are you able to alternate between sitting and standing at work?
- Are your feet flat on the floor whilst you work?
- When at a desk, are your wrists in a neutral position?
- Does your monitor align with your eye level and your keyboard so that your arms hang vertically? (The top of the screen should be at or slightly below eye level. If you wear bifocals, lower the monitor an additional 1 to 2 inches for more comfortable viewing).
- Can you adjust your chair so that your knees are about level with your hips?
- Can you get up and walk around regularly? Try and move your body as often as you can throughout the workday. Think of standing / moving as pushing a reset button on your body.

## FUNCTIONAL EXERCISES

The following exercises combine both aerobic and resistance exercises and are movements that are practical for everyday living, such as carrying shopping bags or climbing stairs. They are activities we can take for granted but are often affected by symptoms of the menopause. These exercises will help you to feel stronger and function better during your daily life.

### LOADED CARRY E.G. FARMER'S WALK

- Place two equally weighted loads either side of you. You can use anything from dumbbells to bags.
- Inhale, tighten your pelvic floor, then carefully lift them up whilst bending your knees and keeping your back straight.
- Walk in a straight line and back – aim for around 10-20 metres.
- Ensure your chest is up with your shoulders in a neutral position. Keep your head up and look straight ahead, not down at the floor.
- Carefully place the weighted loads on the floor again by exhaling and bending your knees with a straight back.

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# STEP UP

- Choose a stable, steady surface to perform a step up and ensure it is at a height that you can do a controlled and smooth movement both up and down.
- Start by facing the step with your arms by your side.
- Step forward with your left leg onto the step and push up through this leg to raise the rest of your body up. Then bring your right leg forward onto the step as well.
- Step down in a controlled manner, leading with your right leg. Return to a standing position with feet next to each other on the ground.
- Repeat the set with the opposite leg leading first.



# ONE-ARM DEADLIFT

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and feet pointing forward with a weight or load next to your right foot. Again, this can be anything with a handle such as a bag, weighted sandbag or kettlebell.
- Inhale and bend your knees whilst pushing your hips back and grab the weight with your right hand.
- Push your chest out, thrust your hips forward and stand up whilst exhaling, lifting up the weight.
- Pause at the top to inhale, then exhale and bend your legs to carefully lower the weight back to the starting position.
- Repeat the set on the opposite side.



# FLEXIBILITY & BALANCE

## WHAT ARE FLEXIBILITY & BALANCE ACTIVITIES?

Flexibility activities improve the ability of your joints to maintain the movement necessary for carrying out daily tasks and physical activity, whilst having good balance means you can coordinate and control these movements.



## HOW CAN FLEXIBILITY & BALANCE ACTIVITIES HELP MANAGE MY SYMPTOMS?

Good flexibility is important, especially during menopause. Oestrogen is responsible for regulating fluid levels in the body; so, if levels of this hormone are low, the body becomes less able to hold water. This can affect the hydration, elasticity, and ultimately the flexibility of your joint tissues, including the cartilage, ligaments, and tendons. When your ligaments and tendons lose their flexibility, your range and ease of movement can be reduced.

Practicing regular flexibility activities can improve your range of motion, in turn decreasing muscle soreness and pain in the lower back and joints. This can reduce your risk of injuries like fractures and muscle tearing.

As well, low oestrogen can affect your blood pressure, leading to a restricted flow of blood and oxygen to the brain. This can create the loss of equilibrium that many women experience as dizziness. Changes to your oestrogen levels can also affect the inner ear, which is critical to our sense of balance. Hot flushes, anxiety and fatigue are other common symptoms known to cause dizziness and loss of balance.

Practicing regular balance activities can increase blood circulation to the brain, heart, limbs and practically all parts of your body, reducing feelings of dizziness as well as improving posture and physical performance.

### Did you know...

- Ligaments connect one bone to another and are needed for joint stability.
- Tendons connect your muscles to the bones so that when a muscle contracts it moves the bone.
- Up to 80% of cartilage is water, so it is no surprise our flexibility is affected by menopause!

# WHAT COUNTS AS FLEXIBILITY & BALANCE ACTIVITIES?

Examples include:

- Stretching – improves range of motion and decreases your risk of injury
- Yoga – promotes relaxation and mindfulness which improves sleep, and can help to manage symptoms like depression and anxiety
- Pilates – improves posture and pelvic floor function
- Desk based exercises to keep you mobile and improve blood circulation (see Page 15)
- Dance – improves co-ordination and self-confidence

## CHALLENGE!

Stand on one leg and close your eyes – how long can you hold it for without holding on to something? Can you hold it for the same amount of time on each leg? Can you raise your arms above your head?

## NOT SURE WHERE TO START?

Begin small and simple with some different stretches. Try to incorporate stretching into your daily life. Can you make it part of your morning routine? Could you encourage the family to have a go together? Or could you make a habit of stretching before and/or after any physical activity? See some key stretches on the next page.



# SHOULDER STRETCH

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Take your right arm and cross it over your body, close to your chest.
- Using your left hand, place this behind the right elbow, providing extra pull to your right arm across your body.
- Hold this position for between 15-30 seconds.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



# GLUTEAL STRETCH

- Lie on your back and bend both knees.
- Cross your left leg over the right leg and interlock your fingers behind the right thigh so that they are resting on the hamstring.
- Gently pull your right leg towards you until you feel a stretch in your left buttock muscles.
- Hold this position for 15-30 seconds.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



# QUADRICEPS STRETCH

- Stand up straight and shift your weight onto your right leg.
- Your right hand can hold a wall or back of a chair for stability if necessary.
- Lift up your left foot by bending your left knee and grasping the foot behind you in your left hand.
- Pull the foot towards your buttock until you feel a stretch over the front of your thigh. To increase the stretch, push your hips forward.
- Hold this for 15-30 seconds.
- Repeat on the opposite side.



# LYING TWIST STRETCH

- Lie on your back with your shoulder blades flat on the floor.
- Bend your right knee up towards your chest and then drop it across your body towards the floor, using your left hand placed on the right knee.
- Ensure both shoulder blades remain on the floor, and you can gaze over the right shoulder.
- Hold this position for 15-30 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



## TOP TIP!

Foam rolling is another very easy way to improve your flexibility by easing muscle tension. As a result, it can help you to recover faster after physical activity, reduce any muscle soreness and improve your range of motion. This activity is great to do before or after your workout routines. Plus, you can do it whilst watching TV!

*Our Active Menopause activity resources have been created by Active Together in collaboration with Dr Natalie Shur, Specialist Registrar in Sport and Exercise Medicine.*



# PELVIC HEALTH

Pelvic health is an area of women's wellbeing which is affected by the menopause transition. During menopause, oestrogen levels begin to decrease. These hormonal changes can cause pelvic organs and tissues to become thinner and weaker. This is a natural part of menopause, but there are things you can do to help. Below is some information about your pelvic floor, exercises you can do to manage symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction, and specialist advice for overall good pelvic health.



## WHAT IS YOUR PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor is a hammock of muscles that go from your pubic bone at the front of your pelvis to your tailbone at the back. This hammock supports the pelvic organs (bladder, bowel and uterus).

Within the pelvic floor are holes, which connect to the bladder and bowel. The pelvic floor wrap around these holes and, when working correctly, close these holes to prevent the leaking of urine or passing of wind or faeces during times of impact or increased strain such as lifting, laughing or coughing, during aerobic activities such as long walks or during prolonged standing.

## HOW DOES YOUR PELVIC FLOOR CHANGE AFTER CHILDBIRTH?

After childbirth there is a change to the pelvic floor. This is caused by 2 main factors:

1. During pregnancy there is a gradual increase in weight through the pelvic floor and increased elasticity to accommodate this. This means the pelvic floor might not be as responsive to impact as it was before, and you may have noticed some associated symptoms during pregnancy, such as leaking urine when you sneezed. Therefore, having a C-section does not make you immune to pelvic floor concerns.
2. Birth. Particularly if you needed stitches or instruments to deliver the baby vaginally, as this could have caused damage such as tears. Even if you didn't, during a vaginal delivery the pelvic floor stretches between 1.5-3 times its length, therefore it's understandable that it will need support in recovery.

# HOW DOES YOUR PELVIC FLOOR CHANGE DURING MENOPAUSE?

Another time during life when you may notice pelvic floor changes is during perimenopause and into menopause. This is due to the change in oestrogen levels which can cause vaginal atrophy and reduction in the bulk of the pelvic floor muscles, meaning they can sometimes struggle to function as effectively. Your pelvic floor may also change as a result of menopausal weight gain.

## SYMPTOMS OF PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTION

If you are struggling with pelvic floor dysfunction you may be experiencing:

- Stress urinary incontinence
- Urinary urgency
- Faecal incontinence
- Wind incontinence
- Prolapse
- Vaginal dryness / irritation
- Pelvic pain

These symptoms affect many people. We know that 1 in 3 women will experience stress urinary incontinence, and that after 80% of vaginal birth deliveries there will be some degree of prolapse.

***If you're struggling with any of these symptoms, you're not on your own.***



# PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

A good starting point to try and help your symptoms is to start doing some pelvic floor exercises - this is where you are activating that hammock of muscles.

## SLOW SQUEEZE

A simple way to do this exercise is to imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind, and holding for a few seconds, without holding your breath. Try and start the squeeze as you exhale as this supports the direction the pelvic floor is moving. When you get to the end of the exhale, relax for 10 seconds and then repeat. This is called a slow squeeze. You're trying to lift / draw up the pelvic floor – perhaps imagine that your pelvic floor is shaped like a diamond (pubic bone, tailbone, right and left sit bones) – now bring each corner of the diamond together.

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I BE DOING?

Try and do between 10-15 slow squeezes and 10-15 quick squeezes up to 3 times a day. Every week you can add more squeezes, but be careful not to overdo it, and always have a rest between sets of squeezes. You can try in different positions to see what works best for you. Start pelvic floor exercises in a lying or sitting position and then progress to standing, or when carrying out other activities, such as brushing your teeth or making a drink.

*Our Pelvic Health resource has been created by Gemma Richardson from Her Physio, specialist Women's Health Physiotherapist, in collaboration with Active Together.*

*Find out more about Her Physio:  
[www.herphysio.com](http://www.herphysio.com)*



## QUICK SQUEEZE

Another way to activate the pelvic floor is by doing quick squeezes. This is exactly the same technique as the slow squeeze, except this time you're not holding it whilst exhaling. Instead, do a quick exhale and whilst doing that do a quick pelvic floor squeeze.

## TOP TIP: THE KNACK TECHNIQUE

The knack technique is when you tighten your pelvic floor muscles before and during certain activities to reduce strain on your pelvic floor muscles and prevent the leakage of urine. You should use this technique when you:

- cough
- sneeze
- laugh
- pick something up

# THE BENEFITS OF REGULAR PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES INCLUDE:

- Improved bladder and gynaecological symptoms including urinary incontinence
- Reduced risk of pelvic organ prolapse
- Enhanced postural support
- Improved bowel control
- Improved recovery after childbirth
- Improved sexual function, satisfaction and may improve vaginal dryness
- Improved quality of life

## FURTHER HELP

- Pelvic health issues affect a lot of women – probably more than what the stats tell us.
- You do not have to put up with these symptoms and starting pelvic floor exercises can be a great first step.
- You don't have to do it alone – Women's Health Physiotherapists are specifically trained in assessing and managing these concerns.
- Finally, it's never too late to get help! If you've been experiencing symptoms for years, it is absolutely possible to see big improvements.

## LINKS TO FURTHER SUPPORT:

### NHS Squeezzy

It is easy to forget to do your exercises, especially when you start to improve. To help you remember to do the exercises, you may find it useful to download the NHS Squeezzy app. You can enter your exercise plan and set reminders on the app.

Visit: [www.squeezyyapp.com](http://www.squeezyyapp.com)



## WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Firstly, have a go and monitor your symptoms.

You need to build up the exercises gradually over a period of weeks. If you do your exercises regularly you should see some improvement in three to six months. Some people may notice an improvement after six weeks. You should exercise your pelvic floor muscles every day for life. Training should become part of your daily routine, even if you do not have any pelvic floor symptoms.

However, if you don't see an improvement in your symptoms, it is recommended that you see a Women's Health or Pelvic Health

Physiotherapist. They can check you're doing the exercises correctly and how strong you are, amongst other things to help manage your symptoms better.

### Active Mums Club

Active Mums Club have created a Core Rehab workout for you to try at home.



Visit:

[www.activemumsclub.org/at-home1](http://www.activemumsclub.org/at-home1)



# FURTHER SUPPORT

## ACTIVE MENOPAUSE

For more information on Active Menopause, please visit:

[www.active-together.org/activemenopause](http://www.active-together.org/activemenopause)



## LLR GIRLS CAN

Join our LLR Girls Can community of active women and girls across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland:

[www.active-together.org/llrgirlscan](http://www.active-together.org/llrgirlscan)



## GET ACTIVE SEARCH ENGINE

For further ways to get active near you, you can visit our Get Active Search Engine:

[www.active-together.org/getactive](http://www.active-together.org/getactive)



## YOUR LOCAL TEAM

Or contact your relevant Local Authority Physical Activity and Health team:

[www.active-together.org/yourlocalteam](http://www.active-together.org/yourlocalteam)



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