

Serving the local community since 2001

# Back in Shape



## Physiotherapy & Pilates



### Helen's Mat Classes

#### Term dates: 2021 Term 4

Start: Monday 4 October 2021

End: Monday 20 December 2021

#### Alphington Bowls Club

Parkview Rd, Alphington

#### All ages and abilities classes

Mon: 12-1pm &amp; 7-8pm

Wed: 5.30-6.30pm (Zoom only)

Fri: 9.15-10.15am &amp; 10.30-11.30am

**Cost:** Mon: 11-week term: \$275

Wed: 11-week term: \$275

Fri: 11-week term: \$275

There will be no casual attendance in order to regulate class sizes. However, all participants will have access to the Wednesday class Zoom recording on my website, plus all previous term's recordings.

#### St. Andrews Uniting Church

85 Gillies Street, Fairfield

These classes were formerly held at the Fairfield Community Centre.

#### Over 50s class

Mon: 9.30-10.20am

**Cost:** 11-week term: \$154

#### Limited mobility class

Mon: 10.30-11.20am

**Cost:** 11-week term: \$154

There will be no casual attendance in order to regulate class sizes. If you are unable to attend the class, you can do it on Zoom instead. You just need to let me know before 8.30am on the Monday. The Zoom recordings will also be available on my website so you can make up a class at any time.

#### PUBLIC HOLIDAY ALERT:

There will be no classes on Melbourne Cup Eve on Monday 1 November 2021

### Is your pelvic floor a barrier to exercise?

Do you experience bladder leakage during exercise? If so, you are not alone; one in three women suffer the same. It is called 'stress urinary incontinence' (SUI), and is common—84 per cent of women report this occurring—especially when jumping, running and lifting weights.

However normal it is, most women keep quiet about SUI. Believing it to be natural and normal after having children or post menopause, only a few will ever seek medical help, while the majority will simply stop the activities most likely to result in bladder leakage.

I recently came across a lecture by *Helen Keeble*, a specialist pelvic floor physio working in the UK (check out [www.umi-health.com](http://www.umi-health.com)), who asks the simple question, "Is your pelvic floor health proving to be a barrier to exercise?" If the answer is 'yes', *Keeble* explains that this doesn't have to be the case.

Women today are engaging in a wider range of exercises than ever before, including many high-impact and weight-lifting exercises traditionally considered to be 'men's workouts'. And this is a good thing. As discussed in previous newsletters, these types of exercise are crucial specifically for our bone density, but also for general muscle strength, cardiovascular fitness, plus general health benefits including mental wellbeing.

But are these types of exercise contributing to a weaker pelvic floor in the long term? To answer this question, *Keeble* considers why we experience SUI. Impact activities or weight training increase our 'Intra-Abdominal Pressure' (IAP), which pushes down on our pelvic floor. The greater the increase in IAP, the stronger our pelvic floor needs to be to counter the pressure. Simply put, if our pelvic floor is not strong enough, it will not be able to stop urine leakage. The solution is to strengthen our pelvic floor to meet the needs of the exercises in which we are likely to engage.

Recent research indicates that impact exercises and weight lifting are actually good for our pelvic floor. A 2017/18 study by *Leitner et al* shows that while running there is a lengthening of the pelvic floor as it relaxes before the heel strike and a shortening as it contracts at the moment of heel strike. This 'reflexive contraction' can be up to 400 per cent more than during a voluntary contraction! Similarly, a 2019 study by *Weibe* shows the same effect while lifting weights.

The bottom line is that both impact exercise and weight lifting actively promote stronger pelvic floor muscles





to a far greater extent than conscious pelvic floor exercises alone. However, for anybody suffering SUI, it begs the question of how to strengthen the pelvic floor without experiencing SUI in the meantime.

If you find running a problem, for instance, try marching on the spot, gradually increasing the duration and speed. If jumping causes SUI, start by rising up on your toes and landing on

your heels, progressively landing more quickly and heavily until you can start adding little jumps before progressing to bigger jumps. If weight training results in SUI, try reverting to lighter weights—or even just your bodyweight—and similarly progressing.

It is a good idea to consult with your physio to get advice on what you can do and how best to move forward. It is also essential that you perform isolated pelvic floor contractions. We do these in Pilates, but you might also benefit from seeing your physio for more tailored advice specific to your situation.

So SUI does not spell the end of exercise. In fact, quite the reverse. As with all muscle groups, we tend to lose muscle strength and tone if we do not use all our muscles. Our pelvic floor is no different. Check out the specific advice on what to do and not do in the side-bar article to help you achieve a happy, healthy, leak-free future!

## Active Standing Exercises

'Active Standing Exercises' can be performed anywhere at any time when you are on your feet with a little time to kill. These exercises can often be performed while you are on your feet doing something else, like washing the dishes or brushing your teeth. So don't just stand there, double your productivity and stand actively instead!

### Pelvic floor with endurance

It is beneficial to be able to hold a pelvic floor contraction for ten seconds, as this will help us 'hold on' when we get the urge to do a wee and help prevent accidental leakage during exercise.

- Start by breathing in and feel your pelvic floor muscles relax.
- As your breath out, squeeze around the opening of your bladder, back passage and (for the ladies) your vagina. Feel the pelvic floor lift up inside.
- Try to maintain the squeeze and the feeling of lift as you keep breathing. Begin by holding for just a few seconds.
- Then relax your muscles. You should feel them let go. If you don't feel them relax, it is probably because they already have! If this is the case, try again and decrease the length of the hold.
- Repeat 4 to 5 times. You can do this every hour you are awake.
- Once you feel you are doing this well, increase the hold by a second. Continue to progress until you can hold for ten seconds. It is not necessary to hold for longer than this.
- Keep all your other muscles relaxed as you do this exercise. You do not need to clench your buttocks, your fists or shrug your shoulders!
- It should not be obvious to anybody else that you are doing anything, making it the perfect exercise to do anywhere, anytime.

## Improving the pelvic floor function

### What to do & what not to do

These simple guidelines will help you concentrate on techniques that will help you strengthen your pelvic floor, while avoiding a couple of common pitfalls:

#### What to do:

1. Specific isolated pelvic floor contractions, aiming to hold for 10 seconds. See the Active Standing Exercise in this issue for instruction on how to do this.
2. Add some impact activity and weights to your exercise, starting at a level where you have no symptoms, and progress as you are able.
3. Learn to relax your pelvic floor. This is as important as being able to contract it, as an optimal contraction starts from a fully relaxed state. Learning how to relax it will lead to a stronger and more flexible pelvic floor over time.
4. Remember that like any muscle group your pelvic floor will fatigue with exercise, so start small and progress gradually as you are able.
5. Focus on your breathing. The pelvic floor naturally relaxes as you breath in and the breath out facilitates its contraction. This is what we do in Pilates.
6. Seek professional help if you need it, and DO NOT be embarrassed. Remember, you are not alone in experiencing SUI!

#### What not to do:

1. Do not HOLD your pelvic floor as you are doing things. Remember it needs to relax between each contraction.
2. Avoid abdominal bracing—such as a weights belt—when you are engaging in impact exercise or weight training. Artificial bracing increases the Intra-Abdominal Pressure, which is not good if you have a weak pelvic floor.

