

# Activating your pelvic floor muscles

In order to prevent low back pain or to aid in your recovery you may have been taught abdominal muscle exercises. It is important to isolate the deepest abdominal muscles so that your low back can be stabilized. Such deep muscle training is often called abdominal hollowing since the navel is drawn towards the spine (Fig. 1). Think of this activity as creating an active brace for your spine by tightening your core abdominal muscles. Activate this brace whenever you are performing an activity which you feel may irritate your back.

Sometimes it is not so easy to hollow the abdomen. A simple trick to help you isolate the deep abdominal muscles is to activate the pelvic floor musculature. Your abdominal muscles work hand in

hand with muscles supporting your pelvis from below. Together they provide stability to the low back.

To find the pelvic floor muscles try the following (Fig. 2):

- while sitting place two fingertips on your navel,
- with your other hand close your nostrils and then try to breathe in,
- you won't be able to, of course, but you should notice that your navel automatically moves inward and that you feel your pelvic floor muscles tightening upwards,
- perform two to three repetitions to get the feeling,
- then, try the same thing while lying on your side.

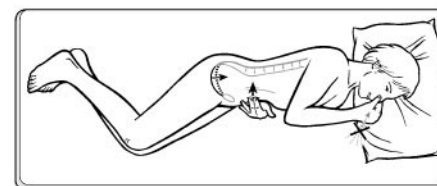
Finally, you should be able to draw your navel to your spine and raise your pelvic floor up without breathing in against the resistance of your closed nostrils. Also, notice if you are squeezing your buttock muscles at all. The exercise is performed correctly when your buttocks muscles are relaxed. This exercise should be performed many times a day in a variety of positions. It should also be performed when you feel you need to brace your lower back because of a threatening situation (e.g. lifting or carrying).



**Fig. 1** Abdominal hollowing.



(a)



(b)

**Fig. 2** Pelvic floor exercise. (A) sitting, (B) side lying.

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