

Midwifery-led antenatal pelvic floor muscle exercise intervention to reduce postnatal urinary incontinence: APPEAL research programme including a feasibility and pilot cluster RCT

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Plain language summary

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After having a baby, it is very common to leak urine. We know that pelvic floor muscle exercises, when done correctly during pregnancy, can help. The problem is that midwives lack confidence to teach, or do not always explain how to do pelvic floor muscle exercises very well. Even when they do, women may not do them as it is unclear why they should.

By talking to many women, midwives and researchers, we developed a way of training midwives to teach and support women during pregnancy to do these exercises. After their training, we found that midwives knew more about pelvic floor muscle exercises and were more confident to teach and support women.

To test how well the training worked, we did a pilot trial where midwife teams were randomly selected to be given this training or continue with usual antenatal care. We sent a questionnaire to women when their baby was 3 months old. This asked what advice and support their midwife had given them about pelvic floor muscle exercises during pregnancy, whether they did the exercises, and whether they leaked urine over the last 4 weeks.

We found that more women who had antenatal care from a midwife who had been trained were told why and how to do pelvic floor muscle exercises, more of these women did these exercises, and not as many leaked urine. These consistent outcomes are promising, but it was only a pilot trial and not many women returned their questionnaire, so we cannot be certain of these results.

We interviewed some women: most were pleased about getting help with pelvic floor muscle exercises and all wanted this help. We interviewed some of the trained midwives. They were keen to help women but said lack of time meant it could be difficult to fit teaching these exercises into antenatal appointments.

We could not progress to doing a definitive trial because a new National Health Service perinatal pelvic health service is being set up. However, we have provided the training developed in this programme to many of the lead staff who are setting up the new services.

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