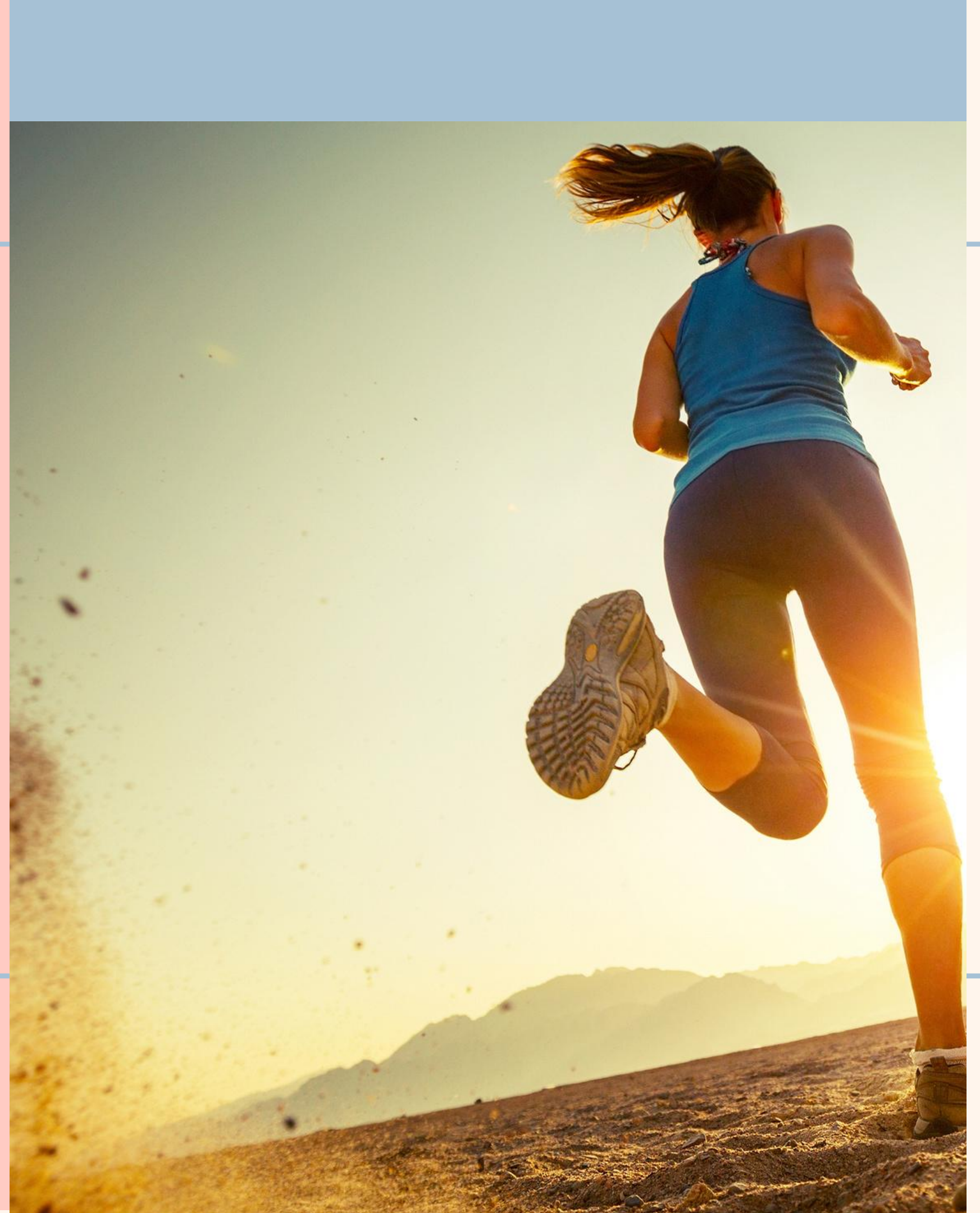


Imogen Williams

PHYSIOTHERAPY & PILATES

Is Your Pelvic Floor Holding Back Your Running?

Pelvic Health: The Missing Link in Running Performance





PELVIC HEALTH
IMOGEN WILLIAMS

Who am I?

- Pelvic health physiotherapist
- NHS Cardiff and Vale
- Private pelvic health clinic in Cardiff
- Former athlete
- Mum of 2
- Pilates instructor



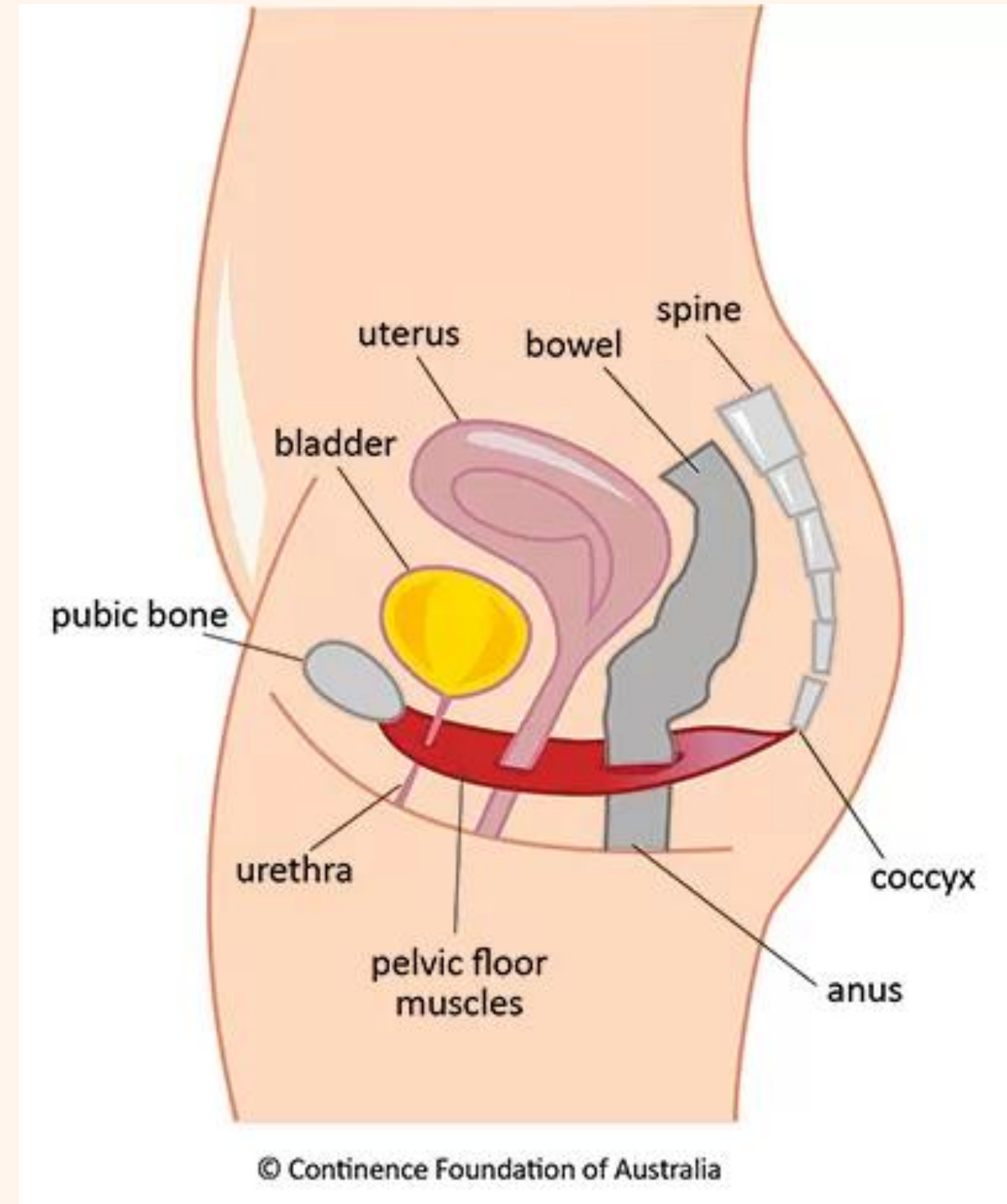


What is pelvic health?

- Pelvic floor conditions
 - Bladder/bowel leaking or urgency
 - Pelvic organ prolapse
 - Pelvic pain
- Abdominal separation
- Pregnancy-related rehab

What is the pelvic floor?

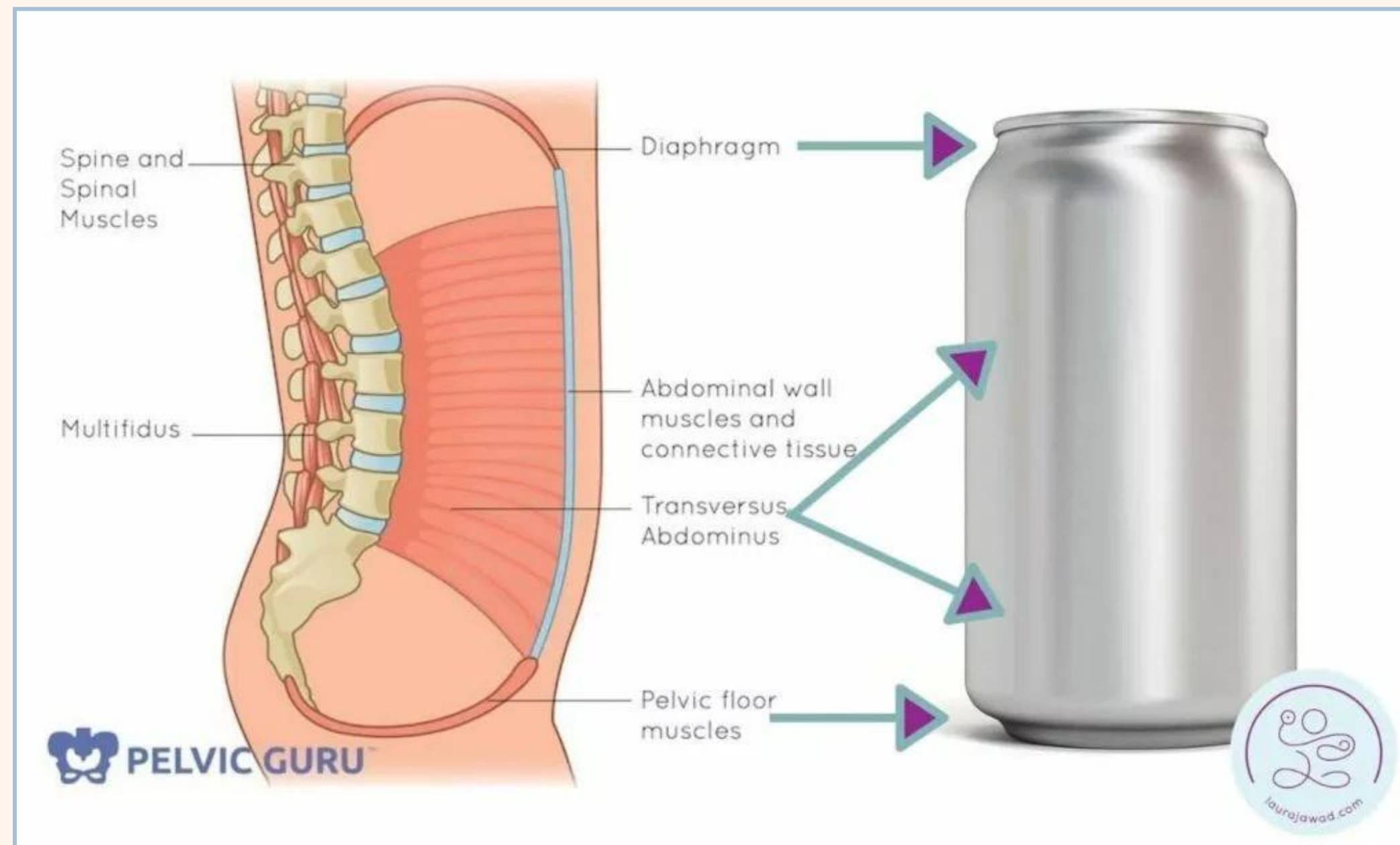
- Group of muscles at the base of the pelvis
- Supports bladder, uterus & bowel
- Helps control bladder & bowel
- Role in sex function for females
- Part of your “core”



The Core System

Made up of:

Diaphragm
Abdominals
Back muscles
Pelvic floor
Gluts



What Can Go Wrong?

- 01** Urine leaking
- 02** Urgency
- 03** Bowel symptoms
- 04** Pelvic Organ Prolapse
- 05** Pelvic pain



Why This Matters For Runners...



- Female anatomy- wider pelvis
- Hormones influences how well the pelvic floor works
- Pregnancy & childbirth increase demand
- BUT symptoms can occur in all women
- Running adds repetitive impact
- Highly relevant for runners

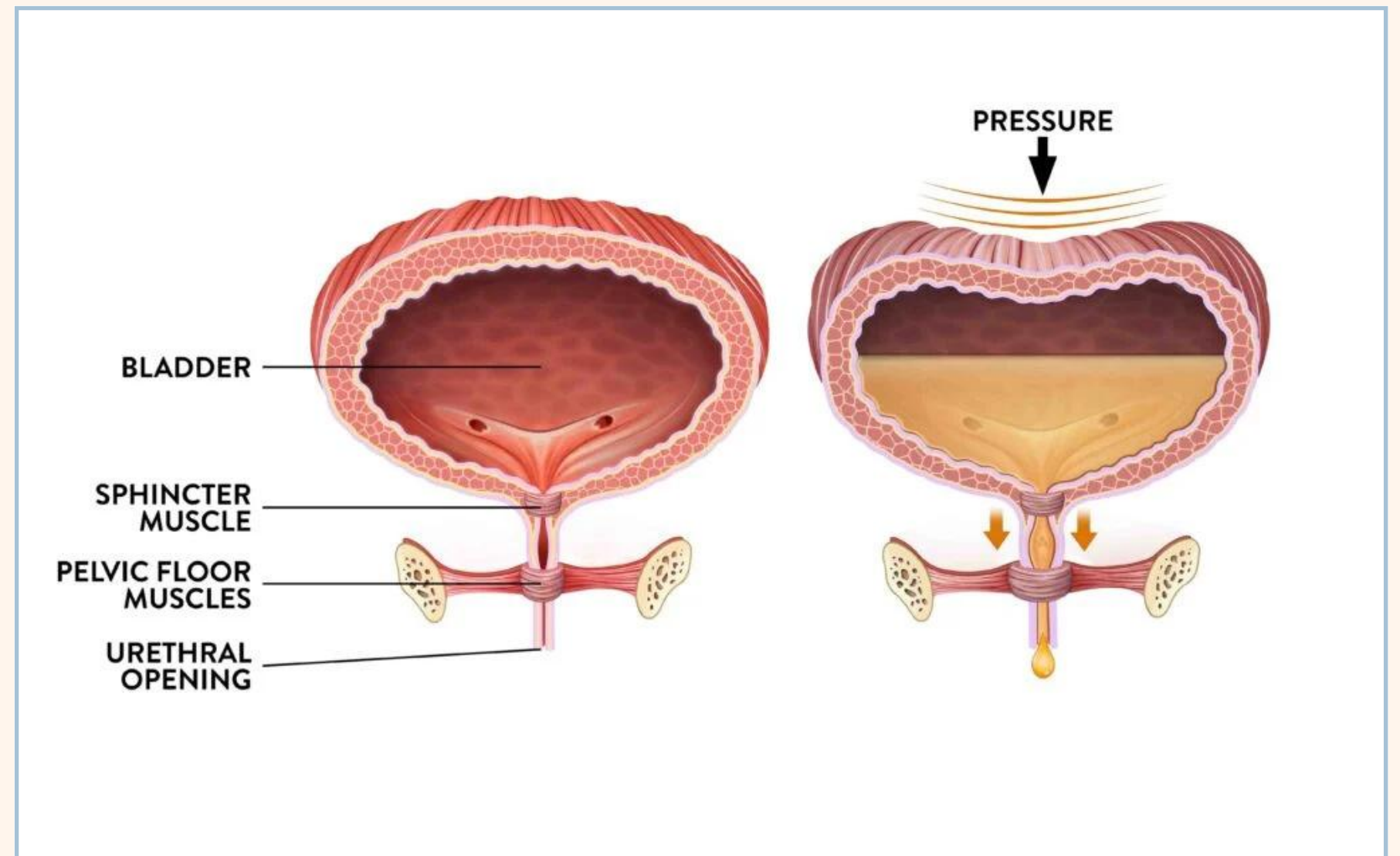
The Stats



- 1 in 3 women leak urine while exercising
- Female athletes are higher risk of pelvic floor problems than inactive women
- Urine leaking in young females who have not had children yet is nearly 3 times higher than their inactive counterparts
- 65% recreational athletes experience bowel leaking
- One in two women with pelvic floor symptoms stop exercise

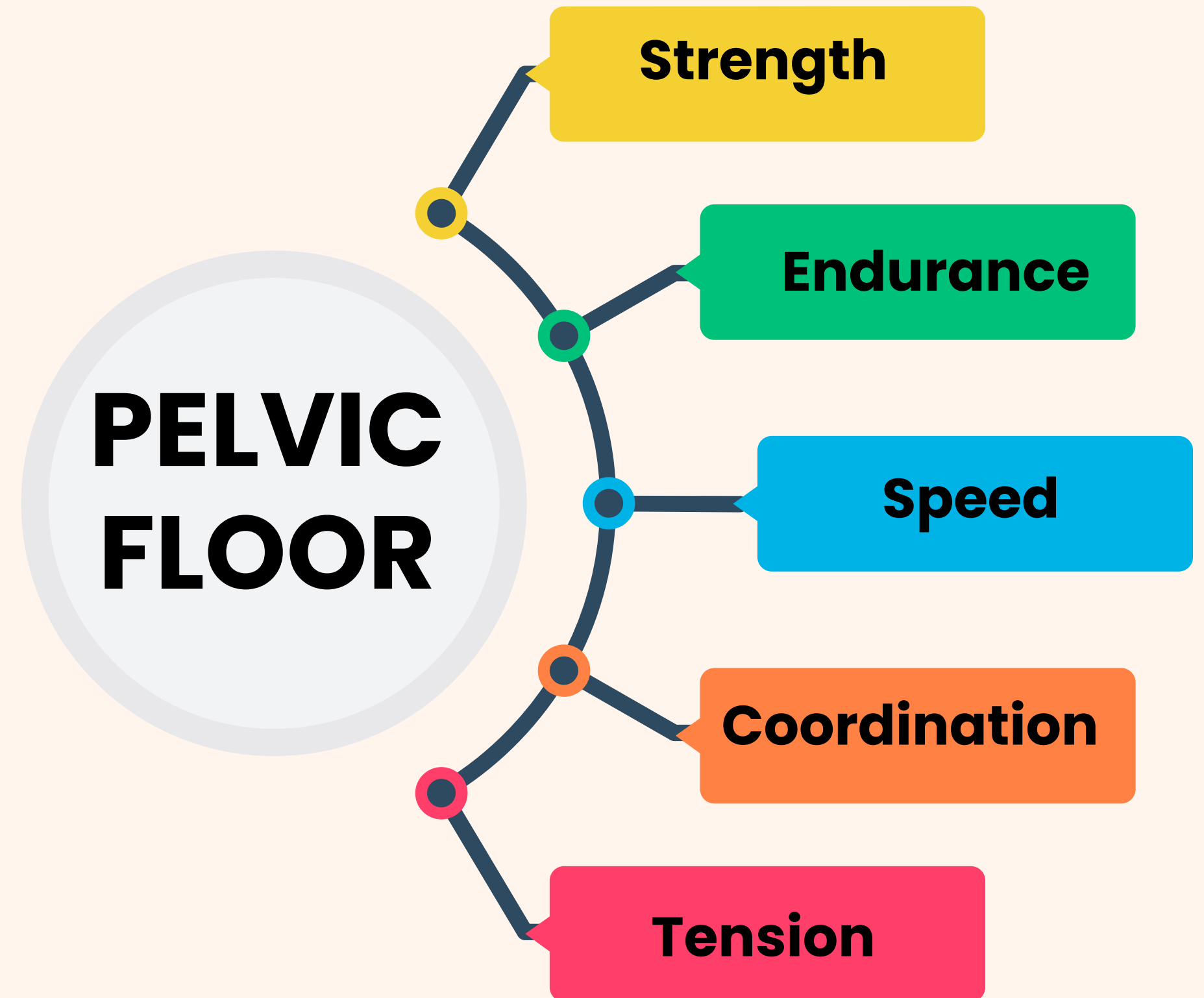
Stress Urinary Incontinence

- Leakage with running, jumping, coughing or sneezing
- Common in female runners and athletes
- Higher rates than in inactive women
- Caused by pressure the pelvic floor can't fully control
- Not just a strength issue — a pressure control issue



It might not just be weakness...

- Pelvic floor exercises are first-line treatment (supported by NICE guidelines)
- Pelvic floor supports the bladder and urethra
- Leakage can happen if muscles are weak or not working efficiently
- It's not always just about strength
- Can also be a coordination, timing, or tension issue
- Assessment helps identify the real cause





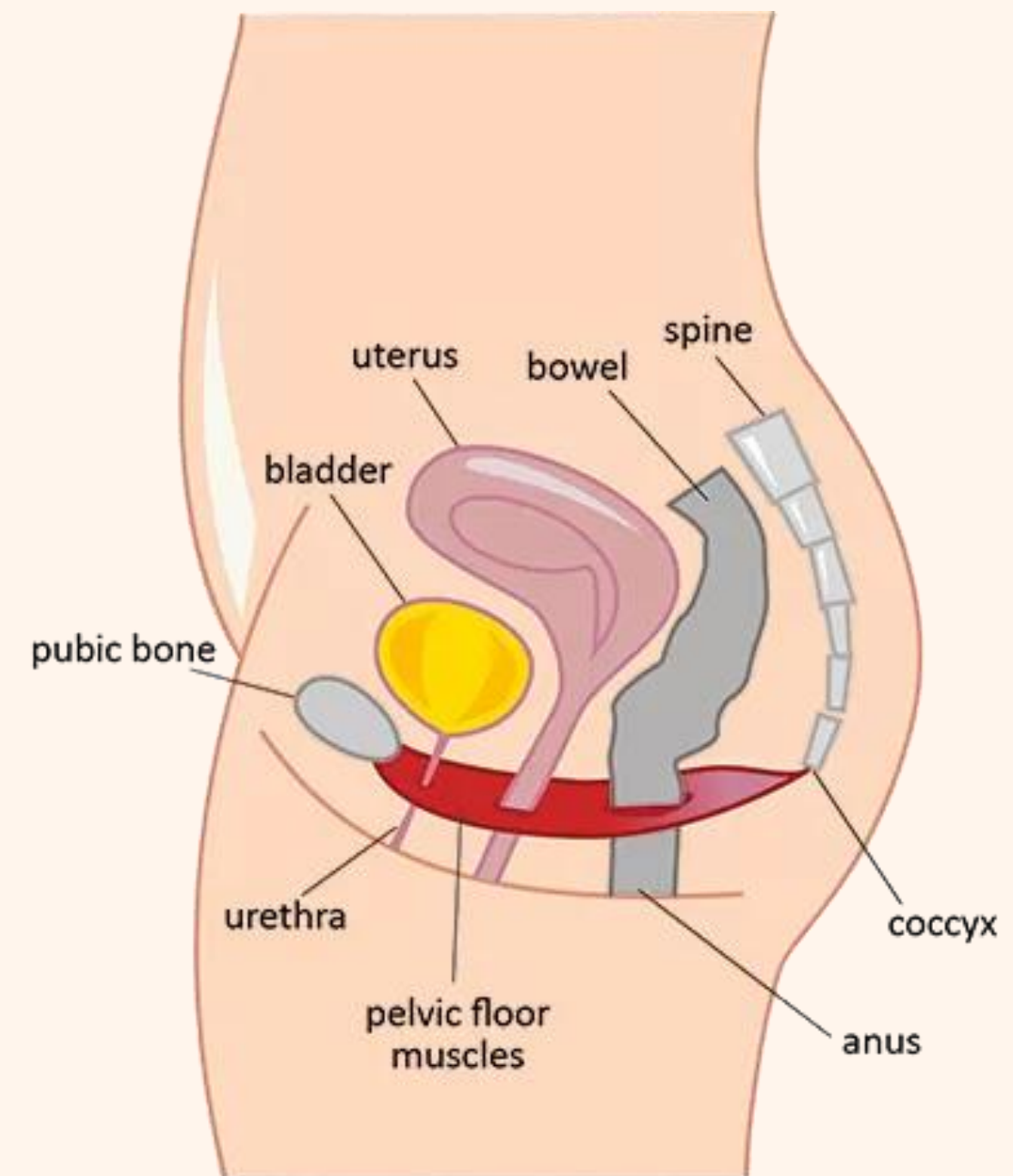
**A tight muscle \neq
a strong muscle**

Pelvic Floor- Shock Absorber



Pelvic Organ Prolapse

- Feeling of heaviness, dragging or bulging sensation in the vaginal area
- Pelvic organs sit lower than usual
- Often worse when upright or later in the day
- More noticeable with running or impact

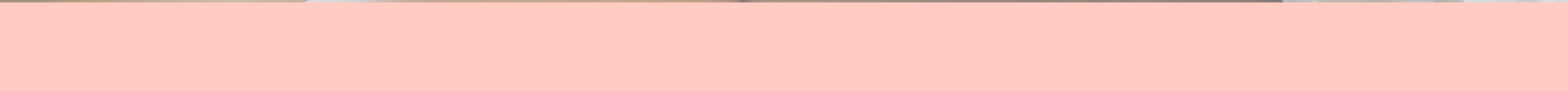


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A woman wearing a white lace dress and a wide-brimmed white hat is lying in a light-colored hammock. The hammock is strung between two trees in a lush green outdoor setting. The woman's right arm is resting on a tree trunk, and her left hand is held out. The background is a soft-focus green field. The text "Not always weakness..." is overlaid on the right side of the image.

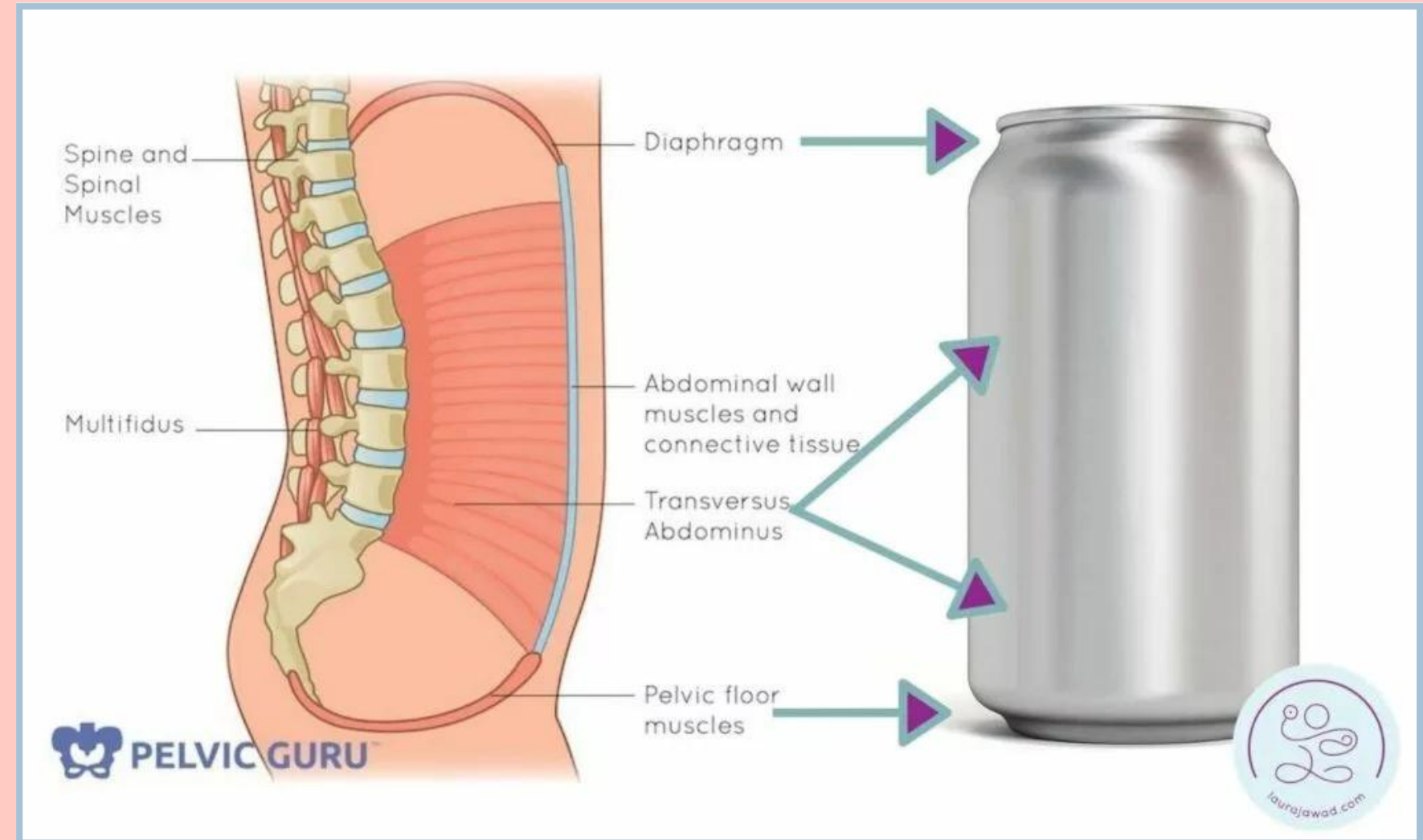
**Not always
weakness...**

Could be tension



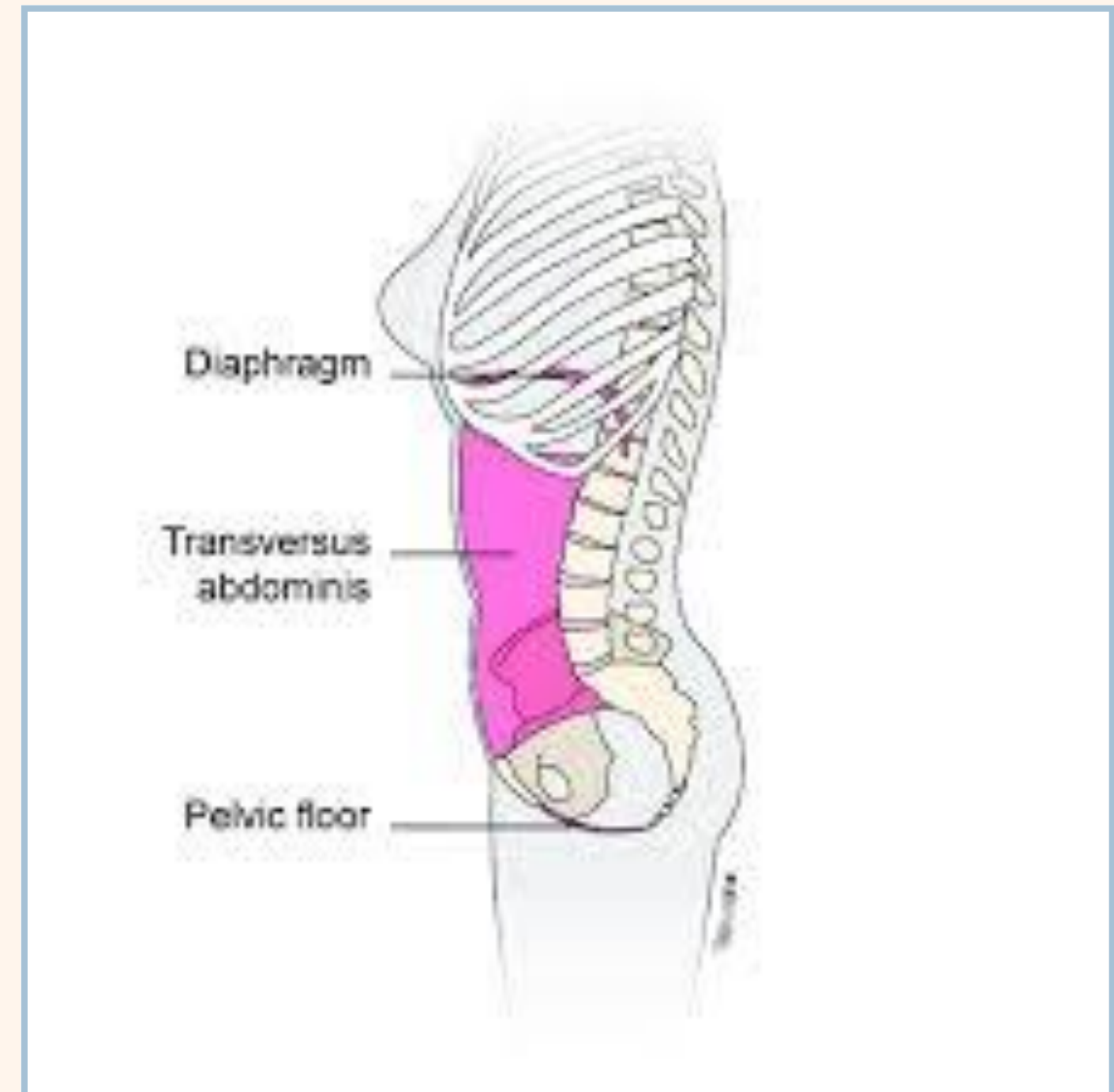
Pressure Matters

- Symptoms influenced by pressure in the core system
- Think of the “can of pop”
- Too much pressure = symptoms (leakage or heaviness)
- Pelvic floor must manage pressure in real time
- Breathing and muscle tension affect pressure



Pressure Habits

- Holding your breath increases pressure
- Sucking in your tummy increases load on pelvic floor
- Constant bracing can worsen symptoms
- Pressure pushes down towards bladder and pelvic floor
- Diaphragm breathing helps reduce pressure
- Relaxed breathing + better habits improve control



Hips and The Pelvic Floor



- Hips and pelvic floor work together
- Weak hips increase pelvic floor demand
- Poor control or hypermobility can also contribute
- May explain poor response to pelvic floor exercises
- Hip strength matters for runners
- Linked with stress incontinence

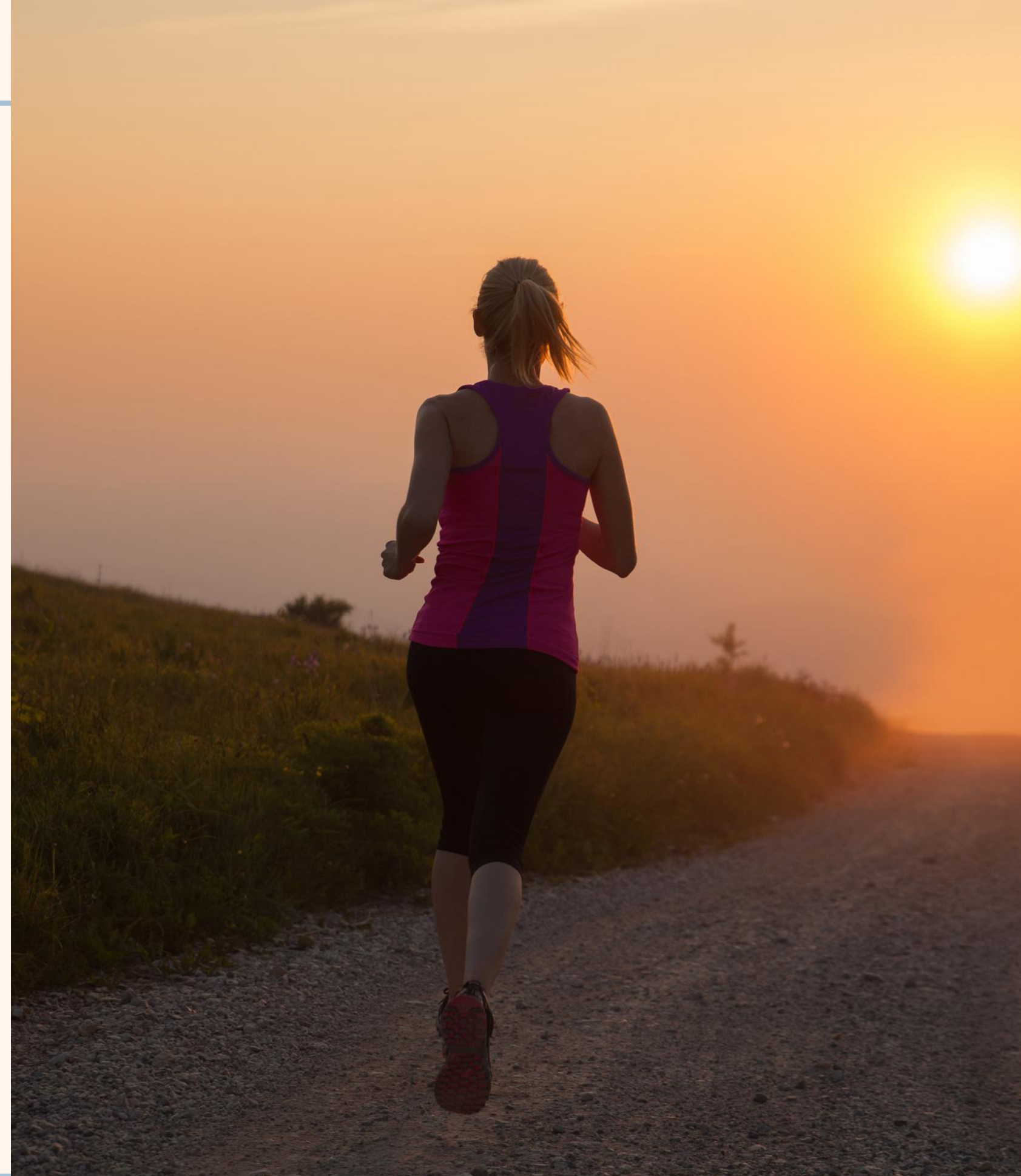
Running Modifications



- Overly upright running can increase pelvic load
- Overstriding increases braking forces
- Slight increase in cadence can help
- Land more under your body (not in front)
- Avoid tummy gripping or bracing
- Avoid pelvic floor clenching while running
- Keep breathing steady and relaxed

Track Symptoms

- When do symptoms happen?
- Early run vs mid vs late run
- Hills or flat / uphill vs downhill
- Morning vs evening runs
- Cycle-related changes
- Use patterns to guide adjustments
- Keep running where possible while building control



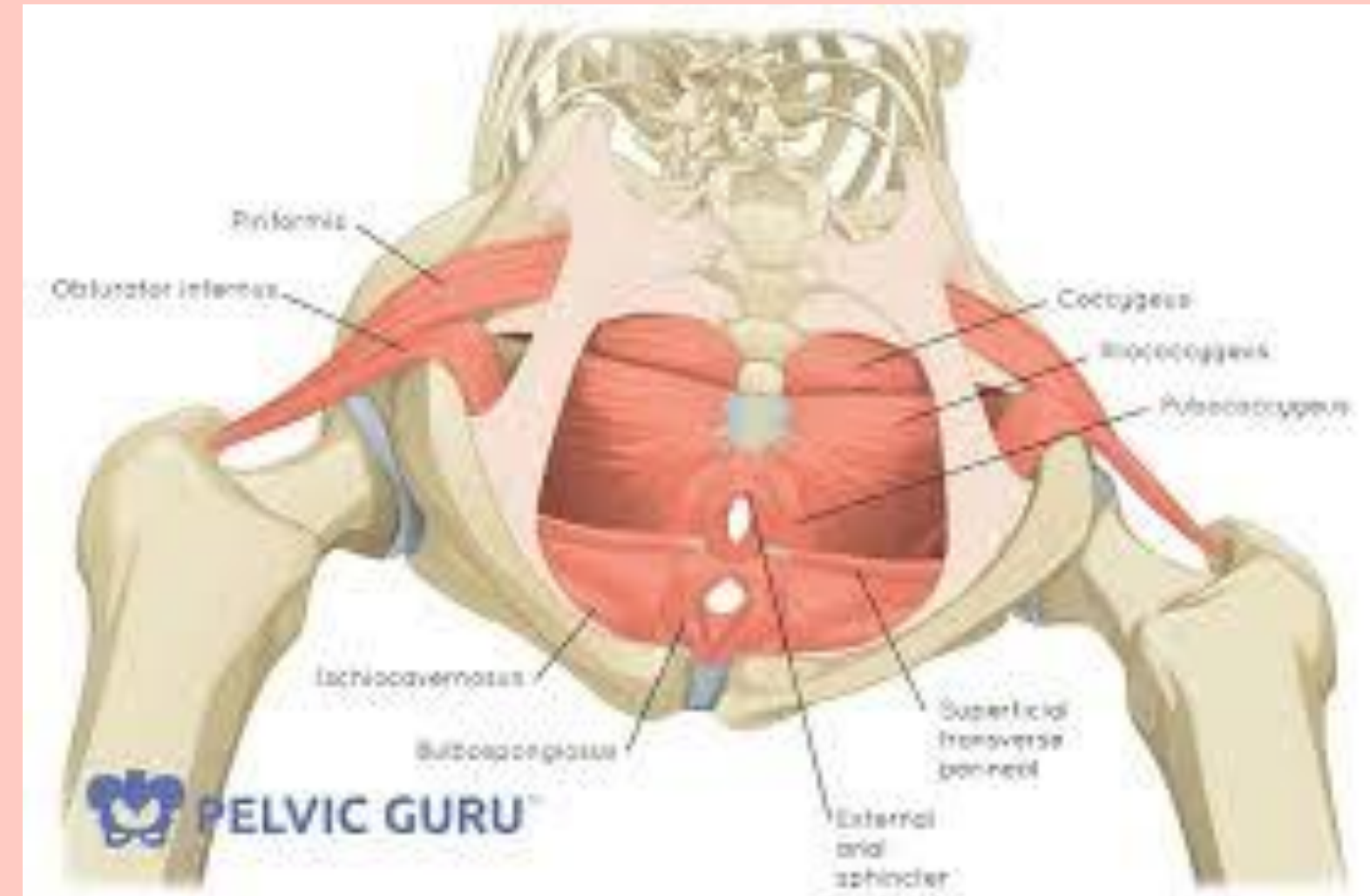
Pelvic Floor Training

- Trained like any other muscle
- Strength, endurance, coordination
- Different problems need different training



How To Contract Your Pelvic Floor

- Gentle lift: “stop wind + urine”
- Lift and relax fully
- No breath holding
- Avoid glutes, inner thighs, tummy gripping



Strength Work

- Build hold time (aim ~10 seconds)
- Repeat until fatigue
- Rest between reps (5–10 seconds)
- Endurance is key for running support



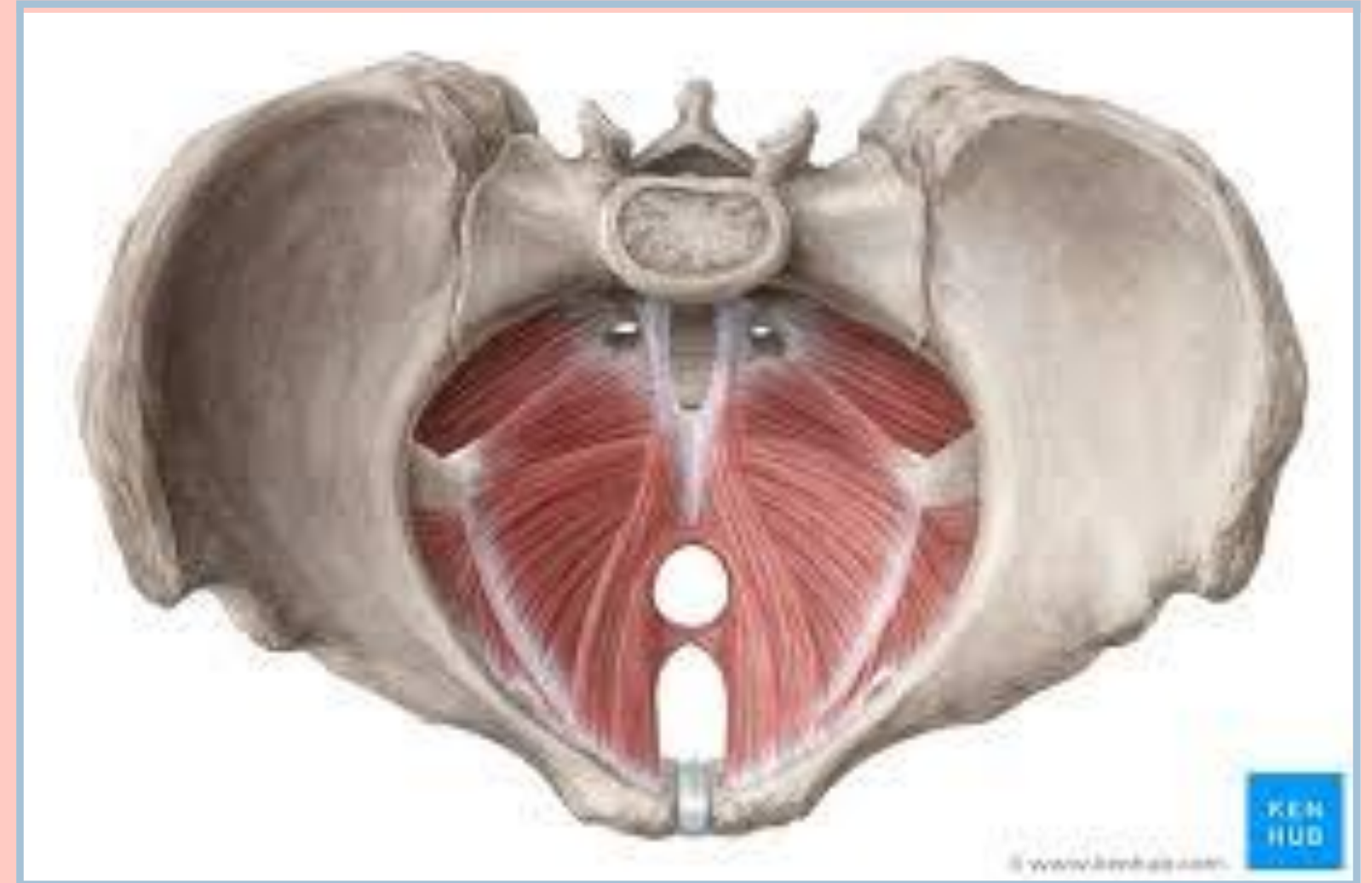
Fast Contractions

- Quick squeeze and fully relax
- Focus on speed + control
- No gripping other muscles
- Repeat until fatigue



Load Your Pelvic Floor

- Train regularly over 8–12 weeks
- Combine endurance + fast work
- Progress positions: lying → sitting → standing
- Build toward functional / running positions



If Your Pelvic Floor Is Tense..

- First step: downtraining, not strengthening
- Reduce constant “on” state
- Diaphragm breathing
- Pelvic mobility work
- Soft tissue release (e.g. tennis ball/rolled towel)
- Then progress to strengthening / impact work



Lifestyle Tips

- Aim for 1.5–2L fluid/day (more if training or hot)
- Under-drinking can worsen symptoms
- Concentrated urine can irritate the bladder
- Caffeine, alcohol, fizzy drinks can trigger symptoms
- Sweeteners and high sugar drinks may increase urgency



Avoid Constipation

- Constipation can worsen prolapse symptoms
- Hard stool increases pressure in the pelvis
- Straining overloads pelvic floor
- Aim for ~30g fibre per day
- Adequate fluid supports bowel health
- Foot stool helps reduce straining



Strength & Conditioning

- Hip strength supports pelvic floor
- Running = single-leg impact
- Balance and control are key
- Single-leg strength is essential
- Include balance drills & single-leg squats



Impact Training

- Prepares pelvic floor for running impact
- Include running drills + plyometrics
- Start slow and controlled
- Progress to higher impact movements
- Examples: skips, hops, bounds, sprints
- Useful as part of warm-up
- Gradual exposure builds tolerance



Take-Home Messages

- Symptoms are common in runners — but not normal to ignore
- Usually a mix of factors (not just weakness)
- Think strength, coordination, pressure & control
- Pelvic floor work is not one-size-fits-all
- Small changes can allow you to keep running
- Goal: manage symptoms, not stop running



Support

- Pelvic health physio assessment can help identify cause
- Treatment tailored to strength, coordination, load or tension
- Sport-focused pelvic health physios understand running demands
- Help with symptom management while staying active
- Early support improves outcomes and confidence



Pelvic Floor Reset for Runners
(Free Guide)



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