

CONTROL OF PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES or KEGEL EXERCISES

Life's events can weaken pelvic muscles. Pregnancy, childbirth, being overweight, chronic coughing, and just getting older can all take a toll on your pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic floor muscles are just like any other muscles. Exercise can make them stronger. Women with bladder control problems can regain control through pelvic muscle exercises, also called Kegel exercises.

Kegel exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, which support your uterus, bladder and bowel. Kegel exercises can also help you control your urine.

When your pelvic floor muscles weaken, your pelvic organs can descend and bulge into your vagina, a condition known as uterine or vaginal prolapse. The effects of pelvic organ prolapse range from uncomfortable pelvic pressure to leakage of urine or stool. Fortunately, Kegel exercises can strengthen pelvic muscles and reduce pelvic organ prolapse.

Learning how to perform a Kegel exercise properly may be tricky. How do you know whether you are working the correct muscles?

The part of your body including your hipbones is the pelvic area. At the bottom of the pelvis, several layers of muscle stretch between your legs. The muscles attach to the front, back, and sides of the pelvis. Two pelvic muscles do most of the work. The biggest one stretches like a hammock. The other is shaped like a triangle. These muscles prevent leaking of urine and stool.

HOW DO YOU EXERCISE YOUR PELVIC MUSCLES?

You should tighten the two major muscles, the "hammock" and "triangle" muscles that stretch across your pelvic floor. Here are three methods to check for the correct muscles.

1. Try to stop the flow of urine when you are sitting on the toilet. If you can do it, you are using the right muscles. * A cautionary note: Don't make a habit of starting and stopping your urine stream. Doing Kegel exercises with a full bladder or while emptying your bladder can actually weaken the muscles. It can also lead to incomplete emptying of the bladder, which increases your risk of urinary tract infection.
2. Visualize that you are trying to stop passing gas. Squeeze the muscles that you would use. If you sense a "pulling" feeling, those are the right muscles for pelvic exercise.
3. Lie down and place two fingers inside your vagina. Squeeze as if you were trying to stop urine from coming out. If you feel tightness on your finger, you are squeezing the right pelvic muscle.

Be careful not to tighten your stomach, legs, buttocks or other muscles at the same time. Squeezing the wrong muscles can put more pressure on your bladder control muscles. Just squeeze the pelvic muscles. Don't hold your breath.

Work up to keeping the muscles contracted for 10 seconds at a time. Relaxing for 20 seconds between contractions. Do a set of 10 Kegel exercises at least 3 times a day. Do the exercises lying down, sitting, and standing. Using all three positions makes the muscles strongest. Be patient and don't give up!

If you have trouble doing Kegel exercises, biofeedback training may help. In a biofeedback session, a technician will insert a small monitoring probe into your vagina. When you contract your pelvic floor muscles, you will see a measurement on a monitor that lets you know whether you have been successful in contracting the right muscles. You will also be able to see how long you can hold the contraction. Another technique uses electrical stimulation to help you feel the muscles contracted. This procedure is painless, although you will experience a buzzing feeling. Once you feel the sensation a few times, you will probably be able to do the exercises on your own. ‘

If you do your Kegel exercises faithfully, you can expect less frequent urine leakage and you may keep your problem from worsening. As with other forms of physical activity, you will need to make Kegel exercises a lifelong practice to get lifelong benefits.