



Kegel Exercises

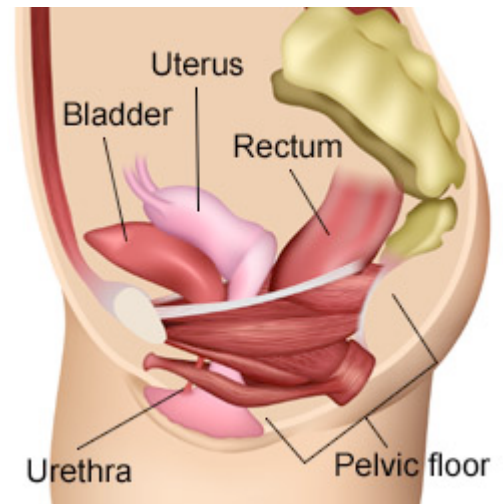
Pelvic Floor Rehabilitation Program

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What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor is a set of muscles that spread across the bottom of the pelvic cavity like a hammock. The pelvic floor has three openings that run through it, the urethra, the vagina, and the rectum. The functions of the pelvic floor include:

- To support the pelvic organs, specifically the uterus, the bladder, and the rectum
- To help provide sphincter control for the bladder and bowel
- To withstand increases in pressure that occur in the abdomen such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, straining, and lifting
- To enhance the sexual response



What are the Consequences of a Weak Pelvic Floor?

When a woman ages, the pelvic floor muscles may begin to sag and weaken as a result of stress placed on them. Many conditions can stress the pelvic floor including:

- Pregnancy-related changes in the body
- Heavy straining during childbirth
- Damage to the pelvic floor sustained during childbirth
- Repeated straining such as during bowel movements, or with chronic cough
- Repetitive heavy lifting

As a woman goes through menopause, estrogen levels fall. This leads to a weakening of the pelvic floor muscles. Weak pelvic floor muscles can result in pelvic organ prolapse (when one of your pelvic organs falls out of place or through the vaginal canal). Prolapse can occur to your bladder, urethra, uterus, rectum, intestine, and vagina. Other consequences of a weak pelvic floor include the involuntary leakage of urine or stool (urinary and fecal incontinence).

What are the Benefits of Strengthening the Pelvic Floor?

- Maintenance of strength, tone, and elasticity of the pelvic floor muscles. This helps support the abdominal and pelvic contents against gravity.
- Helps with bladder and bowel control
- Improves sexual response for both you and your partner

How do I Recognize the Muscles?

It can be difficult to learn how to correctly contract your pelvic floor muscles. There are several ways to identify if you are activating the correct muscles:

- Sit on the toilet. Empty a small amount of urine and try to stop the flow of urine. Relax completely and allow your bladder to empty. If you cannot stop the flow of urine, it is a sign of pelvic floor muscle weakness. If you are successful then you have the basic technique. **It is important to**

not get in a habit of stopping your urine midstream. This can lead to urinary tract infections and incomplete emptying of the bladder. Perform this technique only 1x a month to check progress.

- Insert one finger into the vagina and tighten your pelvic floor by squeezing around your finger. You should feel your vagina tighten around your finger and the pelvic floor move up slightly. Relax and you will feel the pelvic floor lower.

How do I Start Doing Kegel Exercises?

When learning to do Kegel exercises it is best to start doing them in a position that will allow you to isolate the pelvic floor muscles. Try sitting on a hard surface, or lying on your back with your knees bent.

- Contract your pelvic floor in the same manner as you did when you identified the muscles above
- Hold this contraction for one to two seconds
- Relax all the way for 2 seconds

Once you can hold the contraction for 2 seconds, increase the hold to 3 seconds alternating it with a 3 second rest period. Continue increasing the hold time until you can hold the contraction for 10 seconds. Be sure you allow a rest period of the same length of hold between each contraction. Eventually the goal is to hold 10 seconds and rest 10 seconds (which may take several months to achieve). Do this 2x a day for 20 repetitions in the morning and at night.

It is also important to perform quick contractions or “quick flicks.” Squeeze your pelvic floor for 1 second and rest for 5 seconds for 25 repetitions around lunch time. This exercise focuses on your fast twitch muscle fibers that “catch” your urine when you cough, sneeze, or laugh.

Your program for success:

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| 20 | 10 second squeeze with 10 second rest in the morning |
| 25 | 1 second squeeze with 5 second rest at lunch |
| 20 | 10 second squeeze with 10 second rest in the evening |
| 65 | total contractions a day of sustained and quick contractions |

To get the most out of your exercises be sure you use only the pelvic floor muscles, and not your buttocks or thigh muscles. No other muscle movement will be seen if you are doing the exercises correctly. It is also important not to hold your breath while doing Kegels. Breathe normally and focus on the pelvic floor muscles tightening and relaxing. Holding your breath makes it more difficult for the muscles to work properly.

When you first begin doing the exercises you may notice that it is difficult to maintain the contraction, and the muscles do not want to stay tightened for very long. When you feel the muscles let go, tighten them again. In a week or two you will notice that the control improves.

How do I Progress My Kegel Exercises?

Once you feel you can perform the exercises well lying down, try them in sitting, and then standing. It is also a good idea to work them into your daily routine (i.e. while brushing your teeth, at stop lights, or watching T.V.). This makes it easier to make a habit of doing the exercises every day.

What do I do if I Have Problems or Develop Incontinence (Leaking Urine)?

If you try the above instructions and still cannot get a proper contraction of the muscles, pelvic floor therapy can help. Pelvic floor biofeedback therapy is a treatment intended to help patients learn to strengthen and relax their pelvic floor muscles through using special computer equipment that measures muscle activity, and displays a graph on a computer screen for the patient to “see” what their muscles are doing. Patients can learn to use their muscles to decrease the sudden urge to urinate, decrease leaks, and lessen certain types of pelvic pain.

If you have further questions about biofeedback therapy, or how to correctly perform Kegel exercises, you may contact Tiffany Lee (512-557-6310), an Occupational Therapist specializing in pelvic floor therapy.