

KEGEL EXERCISES

Help Prevent or Control Urinary Incontinence & other Pelvic Floor Problems

Tighten the pelvic floor muscles by squeezing vaginally and rectally. Feel the vagina and rectum closing and lifting higher inside of you. It should feel as though you are trying to stop the flow of urine, or hold back gas or a bowel movement. When you release the contraction, feel the vagina and rectum opening and relaxing. Keep the legs and buttocks relaxed during these exercises. You may feel a contraction in the abdominals since these muscles work in synergy with the pelvic floor the primary contraction, however, should be felt in the vaginal and rectal areas, visualization works well with these exercises since there is no external movement to observe. Try visualizing an elevator lifting up inside you and then coming back down as you release. You may try to picture a circle closing and getting tighter as you squeeze, and then opening and widening as you release. Keep in mind that the release is just as important as the squeeze.

The muscles have two fiber types, fast twitch and slow twitch. The slow twitch (**tonic**) fibers are strengthened through a longer contraction, the fast twitch (**phasic**) fibers through a rapid squeeze and release. Perform the following two exercises to strengthen both fiber types.

Tonic: Tighten the pelvic floor muscles and hold for a count of up to 5 seconds (you may need to start with less and increase as your endurance improves), then release and rest for a count of 10 seconds. Repeat this exercise 15 times, 4 times per day. The position in which you exercise depends upon your strength. The exercises are easier to perform lying down, harder sitting, and harder still in standing. As your strength improves, the amount of time that you hold the contraction, as well as the position in which you exercise, should be progressed.

Phasic: Rapidly squeeze and release the pelvic floor feeling the contraction both vaginally and rectally. Make sure that you release the contraction fully with each repetition. Perform 15 repetitions, at least once daily. You may also try to get into the habit of performing 5 repetitions on the commode every time after you are finished voiding. Do not perform the exercises during urination, such as stopping and starting the flow of urine as this can cause bladder infections.

The abdominal muscles work together with the pelvic floor to help pull the urethra and bladder up into the pelvic cavity by shifting abdominal pressure upward and away from the pelvic floor. Co-contraction of the pelvic floor and abdominals before and during a cough or a sneeze decreases pelvic floor bulging and urinary leakage.

Avoid holding your breath while exercising or lifting and try to exhale during exertion to avoid increasing downward pressure on the pelvic floor and bladder. During bowel movements, relax the pelvic floor and avoid straining or pushing to evacuate.

As you pelvic floor strength and coordination improves, try to incorporate the exercises into you daily life. For example, try to do the exercises when you brush your teeth, watch TV, or sit in the car at red lights. It may be helpful to put stickers in various places to remind you to exercise (rearview mirror, telephone, above the kitchen sink, etc.), until the exercises become more routine.

**Don't make a habit of using Kegel exercise to start and stop your urine stream. Doing these exercises while emptying your bladder can actually lead to incomplete emptying of the bladder – which increases the risk of a urinary tract infection.*