

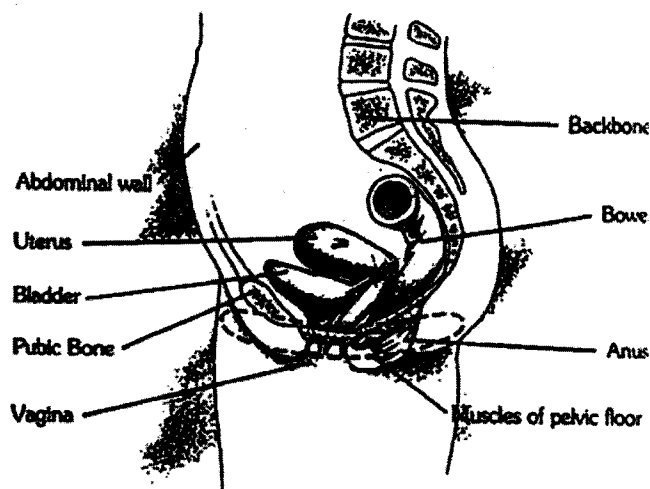
Exercises to Strengthen the Pelvic Floor (Kegel Exercises)

Introduction

Your doctor believes that pelvic floor exercises can help you improve your bladder control. When done properly and regularly, this series of exercises – also called Kegel Exercises – can build up and strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor to help you hold your urine.

What is the pelvic floor?

Layers of muscle stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone in the front to the end of the backbone (see diagram). These firm, supportive muscles are called the pelvic floor and they hold the bladder and bowel, as well as the uterus in women, in place.



How does the pelvic floor work?

The muscles of the pelvic floor are firm and slightly tense to control the flow of urine from the bladder, or faeces from the bowel. When you urinate, or have a bowel movement, these muscles relax. Afterward, they tighten again and stay that way to restore control.



Pelvic floor muscles can sag, however, because of an injury, lack of exercise, childbirth, or just getting older. When this happens, there is less control and urine and faeces can leak.

How can pelvic floor exercises help?

Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen the pelvic hammock so it will once again give support. This will help you improve your bladder control and reduce or stop the leaking of urine.

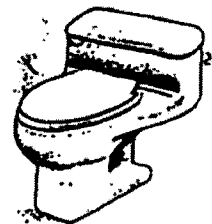
Learning to do pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic hammock. Make sure you learn how to do the exercises the right way – and check from time to time that you are still doing each exercise correctly.

How to "feel" the muscles of the pelvic floor

It is important to learn how to feel the muscles of the pelvic floor as you contract them – to be sure that you are exercising correctly. Here are ways to identify the muscles:

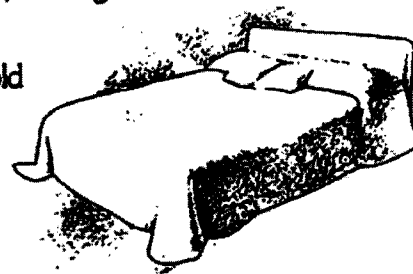
- Next time you go to the toilet, try to stop the stream of urine about halfway through emptying your bladder. Then relax the muscles and allow the bladder to empty completely. The muscles you use to stop the flow of urine are the same muscles you will be squeezing when doing the Kegel exercises. Do not repeat this as an exercise.
- Women may place one or two clean fingers in the vagina. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles to squeeze your fingers. Your doctor or your health care professional may be able to help you with this the next time you have a vaginal examination.
- Imagine trying to stop yourself from passing wind from the bowel. You would squeeze the muscle around the anus. Try squeezing that muscle as if you really did have wind. Do it now. You should be able to feel the muscle move. The buttocks and thighs should not move at all. You should be aware of the skin around the anus tightening and the anus being pulled up and away from whatever you are sitting on. Really try to feel this.



How to do the Kegel Exercises

Exercise 1 Lying on the floor or bed, breathe deeply (don't hold your breath) and tighten the anal muscle, pulling inward and upward.

Exercise 2 Now tighten the vaginal muscle, pulling inward and upward. Hold the anal and vaginal muscles tight, slowly counting "one and two and three and...ten." All the while continue to breathe deeply and evenly. Then relax.



A Few Simple Rules to Remember

Now that you know how to do the exercises:

- 1** Do them properly – check often to be sure that you are using the correct muscles. especially during times of stress, excitement, or when you feel you need better bladder control.
- 2** Do them regularly in sets of 5 to 10 contractions at a time in the morning, at noon, in late afternoon, and before going to bed. After 3 or 4 weeks, increase the number of contractions in each set and hold each one longer, up to the count of 10. When you can comfortably hold the contractions for 10 seconds, you might consider gradually increasing the length up to 20 seconds.
- 3** Do them intelligently – learn to use the muscles when you need them the most, especially during times of stress, excitement, or when you feel you need better bladder control.
- 4** Keep on doing them – muscles work best when they are exercised. Once you have learned how to improve your bladder control, continue to do the exercises to keep the pelvic hammock in good shape.
- 5** Watch your weight – keeping yourself fit also means staying at your best weight.
- 6** Drink plenty of fluids – 6 to 8 glasses of water every day. And don't fall back into the habit of going to the toilet "just in case". Go only when you feel the need to pass urine.

Do you have any questions?

This information sheet is designed to teach you how to control your bladder, so that you'll be dry and comfortable. If you have problems doing the exercises, or if you don't understand any part of this information sheet, ask your doctor for help.

Do the Kegel Exercises regularly. Have faith in them. You should begin to see good results in a few weeks.

For further information about coping with incontinence, contact:

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