



EXERCISING PELVIC MUSCLES

WHY EXERCISE PELVIC MUSCLES?

Pregnancy, childbirth, and being overweight can all weaken pelvic muscles. Luckily, when these muscles get weak, you can help make them strong again. Pelvic floor muscles are like other muscles. Exercise makes them stronger. Women with bladder control problems can regain control through pelvic muscle exercises, also called Kegel exercises after the doctor who first described them.

PELVIC FITNESS IN MINUTES A DAY

Exercising your pelvic floor muscles for just 5 minutes, three times a day can make a big difference in your bladder control. Exercise strengthens muscles that hold the bladder and many other organs in place.

The part of your body between your hipbones and from pubic bone to spine 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 bones.

Two pelvic muscles do most of the work. The biggest one stretches like a hammock, while the other is shaped like a triangle. These muscles, when contracted, prevent leaking of urine and stool.

HOW DO YOU EXERCISE YOUR PELVIC MUSCLES?

Find the right muscles. This is very important. Your doctor, nurse, or physical therapist will help make sure you are doing the exercises correctly.

Tighten the two major muscles that stretch across your pelvic floor. These are the "hammock" muscle and the "triangle" muscle. Following are three methods to check for the correct muscles.

- 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.
- Imagine that you are trying to stop passing gas. Squeeze the muscles you would use. If you sense a "pulling" feeling, those are the right muscles for pelvic exercises.
- Lie down and put your finger 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.

Do not squeeze other muscles at the same time. Be careful not to tighten your stomach, legs, or other muscles. You can check your use of other muscles by placing your hand on your stomach while squeezing the pelvic floor muscle. If you feel your abdomen move or your buttocks lift, then you are using additional muscles. Try to isolate the pelvic muscles. Squeezing the wrong muscles can put more pressure on your bladder control muscles. Do not hold your breath.

Repeat, but do not overdo it. At first, find a quiet spot to practice--your bathroom or bedroom--so you can concentrate. Lie on the floor. Pull in the pelvic muscles and hold for a count of 10; then relax for a count of 10. Initially you may not be able to hold the squeeze for 10 seconds. Don't get discouraged. Work up to 10 to 15 repeats each time you exercise. Healthy sphincter muscles can keep the urethra closed.

Do your pelvic exercises at least three times a day. Every day, use three positions: lying, sitting, and standing. You can exercise while lying on the floor, sitting at a desk, or standing in the kitchen. Using all three positions makes the muscles strongest.

Be patient. Do not give up. It's just 5 minutes, three times a day. You may not feel your bladder control improve until after 3 to 6 weeks. Still, most women notice an improvement after a few weeks. You may notice some soreness in the pelvic muscles and around the vaginal opening when you begin these exercises. If the soreness becomes too uncomfortable, take a day off from Kegel exercise to give the pelvic muscle a rest.

Exercise aids. You can also exercise by using special weights or biofeedback. Ask your healthcare team about these exercise aids.

HOLD THE SQUEEZE UNTIL AFTER THE SNEEZE

You can protect your pelvic muscles from more damage by bracing yourself. Think ahead, just before sneezing, lifting, or jumping. Sudden pressure from such actions can hurt pelvic muscles. Squeeze your pelvic muscles tightly and hold on until after you sneeze, lift, or jump. After you train yourself to tighten the pelvic muscles for these moments, you will have fewer accidents.

Points to Remember:

- Weak pelvic muscles often cause bladder control problems.
- Daily exercises can strengthen pelvic muscles.
- These exercises often improve bladder control.
- Ask your doctor or nurse. Make sure you are squeezing the right muscles.
- Tighten your pelvic muscles before sneezing, lifting, or jumping. This can prevent pelvic muscle damage.

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