

Kegel Exercises

The aim of Kegel exercises is to strengthen muscles, specifically those that lie on the pelvic floor. These muscles are engaged during urination, bowel movements, sexual intercourse and during childbirth. Age, surgery, childbirth, being overweight and specific medical conditions can cause weakening in the area, leading to urinary and bowel incontinence. It is recommended that this type of exercise should be the “first line” of a management program to treat stress or urge urinary incontinence.

Stress incontinence is when a person “leaks” urine during laughing, sneezing or coughing. **Urge incontinence** is when a person feels a sudden urge to “go” and can’t quite make it to the bathroom. These conditions occur in both sexes, but are most common in women after pregnancy, childbirth or caesarean section. These muscles become weakened during natural childbirth, as a result of increased pressure on the area during pregnancy and may also be affected by C-section. Kegel exercises can also strengthen and tone the vaginal walls following natural childbirth.

To make sure you know how to contract your pelvic floor muscles, try to stop the flow of urine while you're going to the bathroom. If you succeed, you've got the basic move. But 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 a urinary tract infection.

Perfect your technique

Once you've identified your pelvic floor muscles, empty your bladder and sit or lie down. Then:

- Contract your pelvic floor muscles.
- Hold the contraction for three seconds then relax for three seconds.
- Repeat 10 times.
- Once you've perfected three-second muscle contractions, try it for four seconds at a time, alternating muscle contractions with a four-second rest period.
- Work up to keeping the muscles contracted for 10 seconds at a time, relaxing for 10 seconds between contractions.
- To get the maximum benefit, focus on tightening only your pelvic floor muscles or isolating your pelvic floor muscles. Be careful not to flex the muscles in your abdomen, thighs or buttocks. Also, try not to hold your breath. Just relax, breathe freely and focus on tightening the muscles around your vagina and rectum.

Repeat Ten times a day

Perform a set of 10 Kegel exercises ten times a day. The exercises will get easier the more often you do them. You might make a practice of fitting in a set every time you do a routine task, such as checking e-mail or commuting to work.

If you do your Kegel exercises faithfully, you can expect to see some results, such as less frequent urine leakage, within about eight to 12 weeks. Your improvement may be dramatic — or, at the very least, you may keep your problems from worsening. As with other forms of physical activity, you need to make Kegel exercises a lifelong practice to reap lifelong rewards.