

KEGEL EXERCISES



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Today, most people refer to the vaginal squeeze, hold, and release exercises as Kegel exercise (named for the individual who invented them). The pelvic floor muscles are special in women because they support the organs in the pelvis (uterus, bowel and bladder). Kegel exercises can strengthen the muscles around the vagina and increase your ability to control and relax these muscles completely. Keeping these muscles strong can help prevent a prolapsed uterus or poor bladder control and may add pleasure to sexual intercourse.

- Over time, weakness develops in the pelvic floor muscles due to normal wear and tear and childbirth. The bladder, uterus and rectum begin to slip down and get squeezed into the lower regions of the pelvis. Stress incontinence may develop (urine is released during lifting, sneezing or exercising). Performing Kegel exercises can help many women relieve these symptoms.
- Pregnant women will benefit from Kegel exercises. They may be performed while on your back only through the fourth month of pregnancy, and then should be done only while standing or sitting during subsequent months. After the fourth month, the growing uterus could put excessive weight on major blood vessels. Following childbirth, the exercises are helpful and can be started almost immediately.



INSTRUCTIONS

LEARNING THE TECHNIQUE

- To get the feel of the muscles, alternately start and stop urinating while using the toilet. Practice this tightening and releasing action while sitting, standing, walking, driving, and watching TV.
- Kegel exercises can be performed while on the floor, sitting or standing. On the floor, lie on your back with knees bent and about 12 inches apart with feet flat on the floor. Arms should be resting at your sides.
- Try to tighten the muscles a small amount at a time, “like an elevator going up to the tenth floor.” Then, release very slowly one “floor” at a time.
- Be careful not to contract or squeeze other muscles when you do Kegel exercises. If you are on your back on the floor keep knees apart as you squeeze, don’t squeeze buttock muscles and, particularly, don’t tighten the abdominal muscles. They can increase pressure on the pelvic floor muscle.
- Think ahead, just before sneezing, lifting, or jumping. Sudden pressure from such actions can hurt those pelvic muscles. Squeeze your pelvic muscles tightly and hold on until after you sneeze, lift, or jump.

EXERCISE ROUTINE

- Do these exercises every morning, afternoon, and evening (3 times a day). Try to maintain a daily schedule. They can be done before or after meals, while in the shower or at the sink brushing teeth.
- Start with 5 times each; gradually work up to 20 to 30 each time.
- In addition to the daily routine, try to think about the pelvic muscle when you are lifting something heavy, sneezing, coughing or laughing. Do the pelvic muscle contraction whenever you anticipate extra pressure on your pelvis. Practice is required, but eventually it will become a habit.

KEGEL AIDS

- Weighted vaginal cones can be used to help strengthen the pelvic muscle. The cones come in a set of 5 that vary in weight. The tapered end of the cone is inserted into the vagina and the pelvic muscle is contracted to try and hold it in so that it doesn’t slip out of the vagina. As the muscles get stronger, you progress to a heavier cone.
- Training on Kegel exercises may also be provided by the doctor, nurse, midwife or a physical therapist.
- Computer assisted biofeedback technique is available in some medical offices. It measures the strength of muscle contractions and determines if the correct muscles are being used.
- More information is available from the National Association for Continence (NAFC), an organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with incontinence. Call 1-800-BLADDER or visit their website at www.nafc.org.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS TO KEEP PELVIC FLOOR STRONG

- If you are overweight, try to lose the excess pounds. Pelvic floor problems are more likely to occur in overweight women.
- Don’t smoke. There appears to be a predisposition to pelvic weakness among smokers.
- Always lift heavy objects with care, or get help with the lifting if needed.
- Keep aerobic exercises low-impact. It is not known for sure if high-impact aerobics affect the pelvic floor, but the trauma of repetitive jolting may lead to damage of the pelvic nerves and muscles.
- Avoid constipation. Straining may cause damage to pelvic muscles or nerves. Eat a high fiber diet and drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of water daily.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You want additional information about Kegel exercises.