



Pelvic Floor Muscle (“Kegel”) EXERCISES

Pelvic floor muscle exercises (also known as kegel exercises)—when performed correctly and consistently—help to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.

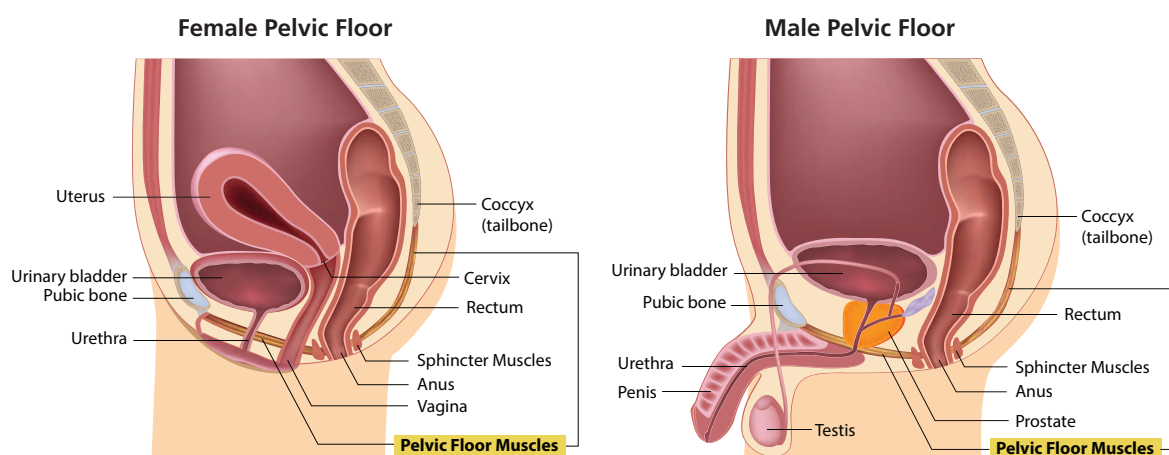
Why are the pelvic floor muscles so important?

These muscles support the bladder, the uterus (in women), and the colon (the rectal area). Strengthening these muscles helps improve symptoms of mild to moderate urgency and stress incontinence, fecal incontinence, constipation, and pelvic pain. Pelvic floor muscle exercises also help improve sexual enjoyment.

On the following pages, you will find directions that explain two types of pelvic floor exercises to help strengthen your muscles. If you have any questions or difficulties performing these, talk with your physical therapist at your next visit, or call us at **617-754-9100**. We'll discuss with you strategies to help improve the exercises. Let us know how you are doing so we can help ensure you have found the very best treatment for your condition.

How to find and recognize the pelvic floor muscles

First, it is important to learn where the pelvic floor muscles are—and what it feels like to use them—in order to perform these exercises correctly. The pelvic floor muscles start at the pubic bone (in the front) and end at the tail bone (in the back). These muscles are voluntary muscles, which means you can control them.



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- 1 When you are trying to hold back gas or stop urine flow, you are using your pelvic floor muscles. Practice gently tightening these muscles. Squeeze and lift the rectal area, plus the vaginal area for women and the scrotum and penis for men, without tightening your buttocks (behind) or abdomen (belly).
- 2 When you first begin your exercise program, check yourself frequently to ensure you are doing it correctly. While you look in a mirror, place your hands on your abdomen and buttocks, and tighten the pelvic floor muscles. If you feel or see your belly, thighs, or behind move, you've tightened these muscles instead of focusing on the pelvic floor muscles. Continue to experiment until you don't feel or see your belly, thighs or behind move anymore, and you are only tightening the muscles of the pelvic floor. It often takes practice to perform these important exercises correctly.

EXERCISE 1

The first exercise works on the ability of the muscles to “hold” over a length of time, building a strong dam to hold back urine.

- 1 Slowly lift and draw in the pelvic floor muscles and hold to a count of _____. Then, release.
- 2 Rest for _____ seconds in between each contraction. Rest is just as important as the exercise, so never skip this step.
- 3 Once you have rested, contract your muscles again.
- 4 Do this exercise in the _____ position.
- 5 Repeat _____ times.
- 6 Do this _____ times per day.

NOTES: _____

EXERCISE 2

The second exercise is a quick contraction. The muscles are quickly tightened, lifted up, and let go, working the muscles that quickly shut off the flow of urine (like a faucet) to help prevent accidents. This exercise helps improve the ability of your muscles to respond quickly when you sneeze, cough, or make sudden changes in your position.

- 1 Squeeze your muscles quickly and strongly for just a second or two.
- 2 Release the contraction for just the moment, and contract again.
- 3 Your goal is to do _____ repetitions of this exercise _____ times a day.
- 4 Begin with as many as you can, and build up to this goal.
- 5 Do this exercise in the _____ position.
- 6 **Make sure to relax the pelvic floor between each repetition.**

The “Knack” For Individuals with Stress Incontinence

- 1 Squeeze your pelvic floor by doing a quick contraction (as noted above in Exercise 2) during activities such as coughing, laughing or sneezing. This decreases the chance you will leak.
- 2 Practice this throughout the day, as needed.

Tips For Success

With practice and dedication, you can take control of your urinating habits and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Here are some helpful tips.

- Do kegel exercises anytime, anywhere! Try to incorporate them into your daily routine.
- Drink up – Your body needs fluids, so be sure to drink enough to stay well hydrated. But, don't drink too much at night.
 - Sip on fluids during the day instead of gulping quickly to reduce urinary frequency and urgency.
 - Stop fluids two hours before bedtime to decrease getting up at night.
- Reduce fluids that can irritate the bladder, such as coffee, soda, tea, alcohol and sugar substitutes, and limit citrus drinks.
- Elevate your legs in the evening. This helps your kidneys to produce more urine so you can eliminate more before bedtime.
- Do not urinate “just-in-case.”
- Never strain to urinate or strain during a bowel movement.
- Take your time when you're in the bathroom. After you've finished urinating, relax a bit, and then urinate again. This practice, called double voiding, really helps empty the bladder.
- Squeeze before you sneeze! Maintain a constant contraction throughout any activity that would cause a leak (cough, sneeze, laugh, lifting, positional changes). Make this a lifetime habit.
- Increase fiber intake to 20-30 grams a day. Increasing fiber can help prevent constipation. Being constipated presses on the bladder and may cause urinary urgency. *Increasing fiber intake is not recommended for everyone; discuss your fiber needs with your medical provider.*
- Quit smoking. Cigarette smoking irritates the bladder and is associated with bladder cancer. In addition, coughing associated with smoking may lead to increased incontinent episodes.
- Women can try wearing a tampon to help control leaks when jogging, running, dancing, or engaging in other energetic activities. The tampon puts a bit of pressure on your urethra, helping to prevent leakage.
- Remember to fill out your voiding diary (placed in the front pocket of your packet at your appointment) to monitor improvements.
- If you are overweight (as diagnosed by your medical provider), work with your provider, nutritionist or dietician, and develop a weight-loss plan to reach a healthier weight. Weight loss of 5-10% has been shown to help decrease urinary incontinence symptoms by decreasing the pressure from the abdomen onto the bladder. Being overweight can also lead to diabetes, which can lead to urinary incontinence.

