

Kegel exercises for women

Kegel exercises are used to strengthen the **pelvic floor muscles**. Strong **pelvic floor muscles** can help bladder and bowel leakage.

Pelvic floor muscles act as a hammock that extends from the pubic bone to the coccyx (tail bone). They support your bladder, vagina and rectum. These muscles can become weak due to stretching of childbirth, chronic constipation, vaginal or pelvic surgery, and the effects of aging. When doing Kegel exercises, it is important to isolate and exercise **only** the **pelvic floor muscles**. The **pelvic floor muscles** are voluntary muscles, which means that we can control them. Examples of voluntary muscles are the muscles of the back and legs.

To do the Kegel exercises, tighten the **pelvic floor muscles** as if you are trying to hold back gas or trying to stop the flow of urine. A woman can insert one finger in her vagina and feel the muscles contract when performing a Kegel. The nurse will monitor your proper use of these muscles initially and throughout the course of your therapy.

You can do your Kegel exercises anywhere, anytime and in any position. Try to do the Kegel exercises at cues, like commercials on TV, stopping at red lights or hanging up the telephone. You should do your Kegel exercises at least 3 times a day. Hold your muscles tight for 5 seconds and relax for 10 seconds. Repeat this cycle 5 times. Gradually work up holding your muscles to a level that you are capable (see sample plan on last page).

Do not try to stop and start your stream when you are urinating. Over a period of time this can cause damage to your urinary tract. When doing the Kegel exercises, do NOT tighten the muscle of the abdomen (the belly), the legs or the buttocks. You will feel the muscle move better if you are sitting or lying down.

Remember it is just as important to relax as it is to contract. Place one hand on your abdomen during the exercise to make sure you are **not** using the wrong muscles. Also remember to relax, breath hard and squeeze. When muscles are weak, it is hard to hold them tight for this length of time. If you feel the muscles letting go, it is okay, just let them go.

As your muscles become stronger, try to do your exercises while walking, climbing stairs and running in place. Squeeze and tighten just before a sneeze, a cough, lifting heavy objects and when rising from a chair or a bed. If you find that you must skip a part of your daily exercise routine, make sure to start again the next day.

Eventually you will use these exercises as part of your daily routine. Do them when brushing your teeth, eating, talking on the phone or waiting in line at the grocery store. The **pelvic floor muscles** are internal and, when you are doing the exercises correctly, no one will know.

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Remember, it took time for your **pelvic floor muscles** to become weak; it will take time for them to regain strength. Frequently, patients must wait 6 to 12 weeks for significant improvement. If you find that your improvement is unsatisfactory, you may be not be performing the exercises correctly. It has shown that only about one half of patients taught these exercises in a routine manner perform them correctly. A dedicated biofeedback program can assist you to perform the exercises correctly and effectively. Once you have improved your bladder control you must continue to do the Kegel exercises daily to keep the muscles in shape. This is a program for life.

- I** Imagine you are going to succeed
- A** Aim to restore muscle strength and tone
- M** Motivation is your most important tool
- D** Devote time each day to exercise
- R** Remember, it will take time to regain control
- Y** You are the key to your success

The following is a sample plan of doing the Kegel exercises:

Be sure to relax between each contraction for the same amount of time you hold the contraction.

Week 1	5__ repetitions of	5__ seconds	3__ times per day
Week 2	5__ repetitions of	7__ seconds	3__ times per day
Week 3	5__ repetitions of	10__ seconds	3__ times per day
Week 4	7__ repetitions of	10__ seconds	3__ times per day
Week 5	10__ repetitions of	10__ seconds	3__ times per day
Week 6	10__ repetitions of	10__ seconds	3__ times per day

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