

Kegel Exercises

Pelvic muscle exercises, also called Kegel (kay-gull) are named after Dr. Arnold Kegel, who developed them to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. The actual name of the muscles is the "pubococcygeus" muscles. These muscles contract and relax under your command to control the opening and closing of your urethral sphincters, or the muscles that give you urinary control. Through regular exercise, you may be able to build up their strength and endurance to gain better bladder control.

Begin by locating the muscles to be exercised:

1. As you begin urinating, try to stop or slow the urine without tensing the muscles of your legs, buttocks or abdomen. It is very important not to use these muscles because only the pelvic floor muscles help with bladder control.
2. When you are able to slow or stop the stream of urine, you have located the correct muscles. Feel the sensation of the muscles pulling inward and upward.

Helpful hint:

Squeeze in rectal area to tighten anus as if trying not to pass gas. You will be using the correct muscles.

YOU should aim to perform ten sets of each of the following exercises ten times each day:

Set # 1

Quick Contractions (QC) -Tighten and relax the sphincter steadily without a break between (Squeeze-release, Squeeze-release, Squeeze-release, etc.)

Set #2

Slow Contractions (SC) -Tighten the sphincter and hold for a count of 3, then relax for a count of 3 (Squeeze, 2, 3, Release 2, 3; Squeeze 2, 3, Release 2, 3). Gradually increase the count to 10: squeeze 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, 10, release 2,3,4,5...10)

In the beginning, check your self frequently by looking in the mirror or by placing a hand on your abdomen and buttocks to ensure that you do not feel your belly, thigh or buttocks muscles move. If there is movement, continue to experiment until you have isolated just the muscles of the pelvic floor.

Your bladder control should begin to see some improvement in 3 to 6 weeks. Make pelvic exercises apart of your daily routine. Whether you are doing pelvic muscle exercises to improve or maintain bladder control, you must do them regularly, and habitually. Use daily occurrences such as watching TV, reading stopping at traffic lights and waiting in line at the store as cues to perform a few exercises.

Use the toilet regularly. Make toilet facilities convenient -this may mean a bedside commode, bedpan or urinal placed within reach.

Wear clothes that are easy to remove when it is time to use the toilet.

Train your bladder. Use a clock to schedule times to toilet. Every hour, then every 1-1/2 hours, etc. , until you achieve a satisfactory schedule. Avoid frequent trips to the toilet "just in case."

Remain at the toilet until you feel your bladder is empty. Do not rush. If you feel there is still some urine in the bladder, move around or stand up if you were sitting, sit back down and lean forward slightly over the knees .

Empty your bladder before you start on a trip of an hour or more. Do not try to wait until you get home or until it's more convenient.

Learn to squeeze before you sneeze -and before you cough, laugh, get out of a chair, or pick up something heavy.

Establish regular bowel habits. Constipation affects bladder control.

Consider avoiding foods that are known to affect the bladder, such as tomatoes, chocolate, spicy foods and beverages, including alcohol, and those containing caffeine. These make the bladder more irritable and therefore increase the chance of incontinence.

Watch your weight. Obesity makes bladder control more difficult. Ask your regular doctor about a sensible diet if you are overweight.

Stop smoking. Smoking has been listed as a risk factor for bladder cancer, and it is irritating to the bladder. Also, a smoker's cough may cause bladder leakage.