

Kegel (Pelvic) Exercises

A "How-To" Guide

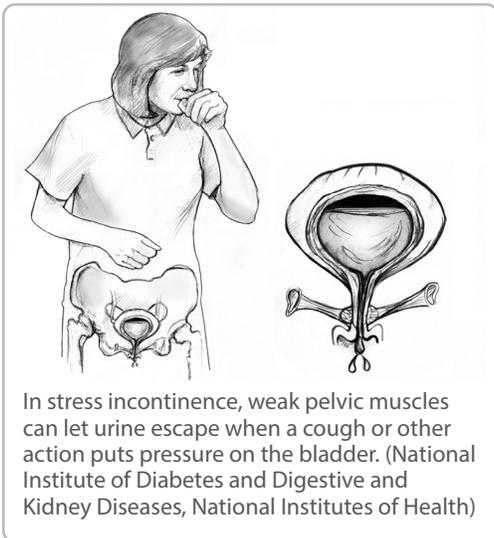
Kegel exercises help strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles hold the uterus, bladder, small intestine, and rectum in place. They also control the opening of the urethra, which is the tube that urine passes through. When these muscles become weak, you can experience leaking of urine (urinary incontinence). This education sheet is a step-by-step guide to doing Kegel exercises correctly.

Who can benefit from Kegel exercises?

Many factors can weaken the pelvic floor muscles, including pregnancy, childbirth, surgery, aging, being overweight, and excessive straining from constipation or chronic coughing.

You might benefit from Kegel exercises if:

- You leak a few drops of urine while sneezing, laughing or coughing (stress incontinence)
- You have a strong, sudden urge to pee just before losing a large amount of urine (urinary incontinence)
- Your uterus or bladder is sagging or drooping out of place (prolapse).



In stress incontinence, weak pelvic muscles can let urine escape when a cough or other action puts pressure on the bladder. (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health)

How do I do Kegel exercises?

Find the right muscles:

Your pelvic floor muscles control the flow of urine. To find these muscles, try to start and stop your urine mid-flow the next time you pee. If you are able to stop your urine mid-flow, you have the right muscles.



Once you have found your pelvic floor muscles, **do not continue to use Kegel exercises to start and stop your urine stream.** Doing Kegel exercises while peeing often can actually prevent you from being able to empty your bladder completely. This can increase your risk of a urinary tract infection.

Perfect your Kegel technique:

1. Squeeze (contract) your pelvic floor muscles.
2. Hold the contraction as tight as you can for 7 to 10 seconds. You should feel like you are lifting everything in your pelvis area upwards.
3. Relax for 5 seconds.

At first, you may only be able to squeeze your muscles for 1 to 2 seconds. As your muscles get stronger, you will be able to hold for longer counts.

Once the counts become easier, you can increase the squeezing count.

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How do I do Kegel exercises? (continued)

Maintain your focus:

For best results, focus on tightening your pelvic floor muscles only. Keep your buttocks, thigh muscles and stomach muscles relaxed as much as possible.

Breathe freely during the exercises. Do not hold your breath.

Repeat Kegels throughout the day:

Like any exercise, the more time you spend doing the exercise, the stronger the muscle becomes. Make Kegel exercises part of your daily routine.

As the day progresses, muscles usually get tired. Earlier in the day may work better for you.

For best results, repeat these exercises at least 45 to 60 times a day. For example, you can try 30 in the morning and 30 in the afternoon.

Where can I do these exercises?

When you first start doing kegel exercises, find a place where you can do them without being interrupted. After you have done them for a while and feel comfortable doing them, you can practice the exercises anytime and anywhere. You can do Kegels in any position.

Always squeeze your pelvic floor muscles when you:

- Sit up from lying down
- Stand from a sitting position
- Lift something heavy

You can practice squeezing your muscles when watching TV, at your desk, standing in line, or driving a car.

When will I see results?

If you do Kegels correctly and regularly, you can expect to see positive results, such as leaking urine less often, within 6 to 12 weeks.

How do I do Kegels safely?



- Always follow directions that your health care team has given you.
- Start slow and increase the amount of exercises. **DO NOT** do Kegel exercises more than 60 times a day.
- Breathe during the exercises. Holding your breath may put extra pressure on your pelvic muscles.
- After surgery:
 - » You may leak urine as you move. You can reduce the amount of urine you leak by tightening the pelvic muscle before you stand up.
 - » **DO NOT** do Kegel exercises if you have a Foley catheter. This may cause bladder spasms and/or bleeding. You can re-start Kegel exercises a few days after we have removed the catheter.