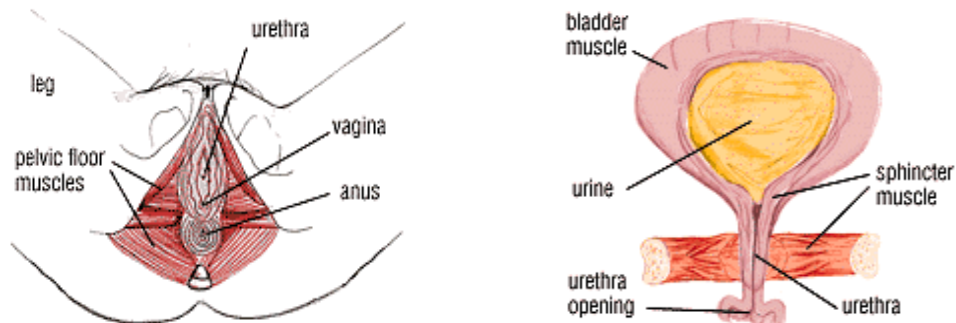


## ALL ABOUT KEGEL EXERCISES

### Why are Kegel exercises important?

Even though we can't see them, our pelvic muscles are important to our bodily functioning because they help hold our bladder and many other organs in place. The pelvic muscles are located at the bottom of the pelvis, where several layers of muscles stretch between the legs and attach to the front, back and sides of the pelvic bone.



Like other muscles in our bodies, pelvic muscles can become weaker or stronger – they may weaken due to factors such as pregnancy, childbirth, being overweight, aging, and decreased levels of estrogen. They can become stronger through exercise. Strengthening these muscles has numerous advantages, including the restoration of bladder control in women experiencing incontinence.

### How do I exercise my pelvic muscles?

The exercises designed to strengthen the pelvic muscles are called Kegel exercises, named after Dr. Kegel, who discovered the exercise. The goal of Kegel exercises is to tighten the two major muscles that stretch across the pelvic floor – these are often referred to as the “hammock” muscle and the “triangle” muscle.

In order to begin Kegel exercises, it is important to find the right muscles. Following are three methods to check for the correct muscles:

1. Try to stop the flow of urine when you are sitting on the toilet. If you can do it, you are using the right muscles.
2. Imagine that you are trying to stop passing gas. Squeeze the muscles you would use. If you sense a "pulling" feeling, those are the right muscles for pelvic exercises.

3. Lie down and put your finger inside your vagina. Squeeze as if you were trying to stop urine from coming out. If you feel tightness on your finger, you are squeezing the right pelvic muscle.

More than one-third of women learning to perform Kegel exercises start out squeezing the wrong muscles. It can be helpful to work with a doctor or nurse who can teach you the correct technique.

### Important Points to Remember

- **Don't squeeze other muscles at the same time.** Be careful not to tighten your stomach, legs, or other muscles, as squeezing the wrong muscles can put more pressure on your bladder control muscles. Focus on squeezing just the pelvic muscle. Breathe!
- **Repetition is important, but don't overdo it.** When you're first beginning Kegel exercises, find a quiet spot to practice so you can concentrate. Many women choose their bedroom or bathroom. Lie on the floor. Pull in the pelvic muscles and hold for a count of 3. Then relax for a count of 3. Work up to 10 to 15 repeats each time you exercise.
- **Do your pelvic exercises at least three times a day.** Every day, use three positions: lying down, sitting, and standing. You can exercise while lying on the floor, sitting at a desk, or standing in the kitchen. Using all three positions makes the muscles strongest. Remember, just five minutes, three times a day can make a world of difference.
- **Be patient.** Don't give up. You may not feel your bladder control improve for three to six weeks. Depending on the severity of your condition, however, Kegels may not bring sufficient relief. If symptoms do not improve within three to six weeks, see your doctor.
- **Be aware of when you should be using your pelvic muscles.** Whenever stress is applied to the bladder (e.g., sneezing, lifting, or jumping), the pelvic muscles play a particularly important role. Squeezing the pelvic muscles before engaging in these activities can prevent muscle damage and can reduce the frequency of leakage and accidents.

Adapted from: National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse, "Exercising Your Pelvic Muscles." NIH Publication No. 02-4188. April 2002.