

Kegel Exercises

WHAT ARE THEY?

Kegel (KAY-gul or KEY-gul) exercises are designed to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles support the bowel (large intestine), uterus, and bladder.

BENEFITS OF KEGEL EXERCISES

Performing Kegel exercises regularly may limit one's risk of incontinence. They can also be helpful in managing incontinence after its onset – especially for men recovering from prostate surgery, women with stress incontinence, and individuals with fecal incontinence.

Kegel exercises are recommended during pregnancy. They may make pregnant women less likely to develop urine leakage, which is common near the end of pregnancy and prone to persist after one has given birth.

LOCATING YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Effective Kegel exercises rely on identifying one's pelvic floor muscles. If you are able to stop the flow of urine while urinating, you've employed the proper technique. While this is helpful for locating the correct muscles, you should not make a practice of interrupting your urine flow. Doing so can actually lead to a weakening of the pelvic floor. If you're having trouble finding the right muscles, ask your caregiver for assistance in isolating and exercising the correct muscles.

PERFORMING THE EXERCISE

Once you have identified your pelvic floor muscles, you are ready to begin. Most people prefer to do the exercises while lying down or sitting in a chair.

- Begin by emptying your bladder
- Sit in a chair or lay down, whichever is most comfortable
- Tighten the pelvic floor muscles as described above and hold for a count of three
- Relax your muscles completely for a count of three
- Repeat 10 times
- Perform three times a day

Notes:

- For maximum benefit, remain focused on contracting only your pelvic floor. It is very important that you keep the buttocks, abdomen and thigh muscles relaxed.
- Over-exercising can cause muscle fatigue and increase urine leakage.
- Avoid holding your breath or tightening your chest.

WHEN TO EXPECT RESULTS

If performed as prescribed above, most people will experience results, such as less frequent leakage, after only 4 - 6 weeks. After 12 weeks, your improvement may be dramatic or, at the very least, you may prevent your symptoms from worsening.