



## PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES (KEGELS)

### PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES (KEGELS): WHY AND HOW?

The pelvic muscle is a sling-like muscle that supports the pelvic organs. It goes from the tail bone to the pubic bone. When this muscle is contracted (squeezed), it also squeezes the urethra (the tube from the bladder to the outside) which helps close off the urethra so urine cannot leak out. Some common causes for pelvic muscle weakness are age, childbirth and surgical trauma. Pelvic muscle strength can be increased with Kegel exercises (pelvic muscle exercises).

#### How to do pelvic muscle exercises?

1. **Finding the muscle.** This muscle can be exercised through the vagina or the rectum. Imagine you had to pass gas, the muscle you use to hold back gas is the pelvic muscle, the muscle you are going to exercise. Another way to find the muscle is to stop the stream of urine after it is started. Or, imagine a tampon was in your vagina and it was starting to slip out, the muscle you would tighten to hold it in is the pelvic muscle.
2. **The exercise.** Tighten the pelvic muscle for a count of 10 seconds:
  1. Contract deliberately, quickly and hard.
  2. Actively hold the contraction.
  3. Hold It.
  4. Hold It.
  5. Hold It.
  6. Hold It.
  7. Hold It.
  8. Hold It.
  9. Hold It.
  10. Relax, relax completely

You will start with doing 10 of these contractions four times a day. These 4 sets of exercises should be done every day.

3. **When to do the exercise.** When you start, it is best to sit or lie down and do your exercises. Concentrate. This muscle is often difficult to find when getting started. It is important to do the exercise correctly, and not use the wrong muscles.

Once you learn how to do the exercise correctly, include it in your daily routine. For example, do the exercises while waiting on the phone on hold, during commercials, every time you come to a red light. In addition, use the exercise prior to coughing, when walking to the bathroom, when you sneeze, when you change your position, etc.

4. **Mistakes.** No one will be able to tell that you are doing the exercise if you do them correctly. Do not use your stomach, legs or buttocks to help squeeze the pelvic muscle. It is also not necessary to hold your breath when doing the exercise. One way to see if you are using your stomach is to place your hands on your stomach. If your hands move, you are using too many muscles.

Often when you begin to exercise these muscles, you will note that your muscles tire easily, or that you are not able to hold the contraction for the complete 10 seconds. As you continue to exercise, this will happen less frequently. It is very important that if you think that you are no longer tightening or contracting your muscles that you DO NOT retighten them to "see" if you are contracting. It is important to maintain constant effort in an active squeeze. What you are trying to do is gain control and strength in the muscles. By retightening, or "flicking" the muscle, you will not be successful in gaining control and strength.

5. **Improvement.** You must do the exercise every day. Some people see a change in two weeks, most do in four weeks. Remember - this is a muscle and it takes time to strengthen it. These exercises are often part of a behavioral program which may include a toileting schedule, changes in fluid intake, diet and constipation management.

There are really no side effects to this exercise. If you hold your breath, you could get a headache. If you use your stomach muscles, they could hurt from exercising them.