

PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES FOR INCONTINENCE

Urology Associates
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What are Kegel or Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises?

Pelvic muscle exercises, also called Kegel exercises, have been shown to improve mild-to-moderate urge and stress incontinence. When performed correctly, these exercises help to strengthen the muscles at your bladder outlet. Through regular exercise, you can build strength and endurance to help improve, regain, or maintain bladder and bowel control. For how to find and recognize the muscles, imagine that you need to pass gas. Then squeeze and lift the rectal area (also the vaginal area for women) without tightening the buttocks or belly/abdomen. This is the proper muscle. It is also the muscle group that starts and stops the urine stream. However, it is not recommended that you routinely interrupt the urinary stream when doing these exercises. Remember to relax and completely empty your bladder when you urinate regularly.

Many patients are unable to isolate and localize the muscles of the pelvic floor ("Kegel" muscles) and require help from a physical therapist (frequently called a pelvic biofeedback therapist). Similar to going to physical therapist for muscle rehab, patients may gain benefit from biofeedback therapy for the pelvic floor to isolate, localize, and strengthen the muscles by repetitive exercises.

Suggested Exercises

There are two types of exercises you need to do. Doing both types of exercises is the best way to help improve your bladder control

1. **TYPE 1:** Works on the holding ability of the muscles by slowly lifting the pelvic floor muscles and holding them to a count of five seconds. At first you may notice that the muscles cannot stay contracted or tightened that long. Simply hold them as long as possible up to five seconds and then relax for five seconds. Do at least five repetitions of Type One contractions at least four times a day. Type One exercises may help prevent urge incontinence.
2. **TYPE 2:** This is a quick contraction. The muscles are quickly tightened, lifted up, and let go. This works to help improve "fast twitch" muscle fibers that will be helpful for preventing stress incontinence.

If you have any questions or difficulties in these exercises, talk to a healthcare provider. Other behavioral treatments include pelvic weights (vaginal cones), biofeedback training to help isolate the muscles, electrical stimulation of the

pelvic floor, and now even magnetic stimulation of the pelvic floor to produce contractions and help improve incontinence.

Can I Retrain My Bladder and Take Control Again?

In 1991, a gynecologist, Dr. Andrew Fantl, announced the success of a bladder training program conducted at the Medical College of Virginia. More than 100 healthy women participated in the program. Twelve percent were cured of their bladder leakage, and seventy-five percent were greatly improved. Some women had stress incontinence, some had urge incontinence, and others had symptoms of both types.

Based on the original description by Dr. Arnold Kegel in the 1940s, even men can improve their urinary symptoms by routinely performing pelvic muscle exercises or Kegel exercises. Prostate operations are notorious for causing urinary symptoms and/or incontinence. Therefore, it is routinely recommended for men before and after prostate operations to practice their pelvic floor contractions. For any further questions or concerns, please contact your physician.