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Kegel exercises: A how-to guide for women

By Mayo Clinic staff

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Kegel exercises: A how-to guide for women

Kegel exercises can help you prevent or control urinary incontinence and other pelvic floor problems. Here's a step-by-step guide to doing Kegel exercises correctly.

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Kegel exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, which support the uterus, bladder, small intestine and rectum. You can do Kegel exercises, also known as pelvic floor muscle training, discreetly just about anytime.

Start by understanding what Kegel exercises can do for you — then follow step-by-step instructions for contracting and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles.

Why Kegel exercises matter

Many factors can weaken your pelvic floor muscles, including pregnancy, childbirth, surgery, aging and being overweight.



Female pelvic floor muscles

You might benefit from doing Kegel exercises if you:

- Leak a few drops of urine while sneezing, laughing or coughing
- Have a strong, sudden urge to urinate just before losing a large amount of urine (urinary incontinence)
- Leak stool (fecal incontinence)

Kegel exercises can be done during pregnancy or after childbirth to try to prevent urinary incontinence. Kegel exercises — along with counseling and sex therapy — might also be helpful for women who have persistent difficulty reaching orgasm.

Keep in mind that Kegel exercises are less helpful for women who have severe urine leakage when they sneeze, cough or laugh. Also, Kegel exercises aren't helpful for women who unexpectedly leak small amounts of urine due to a full bladder (overflow incontinence).

How to do Kegel exercises

It takes diligence to identify your pelvic floor muscles and learn how to contract and relax them. Here are some pointers:

- **Find the right muscles.** To identify your pelvic floor muscles, stop urination in midstream. If you succeed, you've got the right muscles.
- **Perfect your technique.** Once you've identified your pelvic floor muscles, empty your bladder and lie on your back. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold the contraction for five seconds, and then relax for five seconds. Try it four or five times in a row. Work up to keeping the muscles contracted for 10 seconds at a time, relaxing for 10 seconds between contractions.
- **Maintain your focus.** For best results, focus on tightening only your pelvic floor muscles. Be careful not to flex the muscles in your abdomen, thighs or buttocks. Avoid holding your breath. Instead, breathe freely during the exercises.
- **Repeat 3 times a day.** Aim for at least three sets of 10 repetitions a day.

Don't make a habit of using Kegel exercises to start and stop your urine stream. Doing Kegel exercises while emptying your bladder can actually weaken the muscles, as well as lead to incomplete emptying of the bladder — which increases the risk of a urinary tract infection.

When to do your Kegels

Make Kegel exercises part of your daily routine. You can do Kegel exercises discreetly just about anytime, whether you're sitting at your desk or relaxing on the couch. You might make a practice of fitting in a set every time you do a routine task, such as checking email.

When you're having trouble

If you're having trouble doing Kegel exercises, don't be embarrassed to ask for help. Your doctor or other health care provider can give you important feedback so that you learn to isolate and exercise the correct muscles.

In some cases, biofeedback training might help. During a biofeedback session, your doctor or other health care provider inserts a small probe into your vagina or rectum. As you relax and contract your pelvic floor muscles, a monitor will measure and display your pelvic floor activity.

When to expect results

If you do Kegel exercises regularly, you can expect results — such as less frequent urine leakage — within about a few months. For continued benefits, make Kegel exercises a permanent part of your daily routine.

References

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