

Pelvic Floor Exercises: A Guide

Your health care provider has recommended that you perform a series of exercises, sometimes called Kegel exercises, to improve your overall health. Pelvic floor exercises can be used to strengthen the muscles of your pelvic floor and can be done for childbirth preparation or to control involuntary loss of urine. In addition, a strong pelvic floor can improve your sex life.

PURPOSE OF PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

These exercises are done to:

- Improve the tone of the perineal muscles and pelvic organ support.
- Promote postpartum healing and comfort.
- Prevent urinary incontinence or regain bladder control.

POSITION

May be done in any position.

HOW-TO

- Tightly contract muscles surrounding the vagina with an internal “pulling up”.
- Release muscles and notice the relaxation.
- Again contract tightly, holding then release.
- Do not tighten stomach muscles during the exercise.
- Breathe normally throughout the exercise.

If it is hard to get the feeling of this exercise, try stopping and starting the flow of urine while urinating. (do not do this on an ongoing basis.) Another way is to tighten your bottom as if trying to hold back gas. Ask your health care provider to check if you are doing the exercises correctly.

EXERCISE VARIATION: THE ELEVATOR

This exercise is done to:

- Gain full control of the perineal floor muscles.
- Increase flexibility and develop awareness of tension/relaxation, which is important for delivery.

POSITION

May be done in any position, although one that eliminates the forces of gravity, such as lying down, is easier.

HOW-TO

- Imagine you are riding in an elevator. As you ascend to each floor, try to draw up the perineal muscles a little more until you reach complete tension. When you reach your limit, don't just let go!

- Now descend, floor-by-floor, gradually relaxing the muscle. When you arrive at the ground floor (no tension), take the muscle group to the basement with a gentle blowing out breath through pursed lips. This should feel as if perineum is bulging.
- Complete the exercise by lifting up the muscle back to the ground floor level.
- Repeat entire exercise and remember to breathe normally as you tighten the pelvic floor muscles.

WHERE SHOULD YOU PRACTICE YOUR PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES?

Everywhere! These exercises can be done without anyone being aware of what you are doing. Some ideas:

- At red traffic lights
- While cooking
- When you squat
- During commercials on TV
- During sexual intercourse
- Anytime you are waiting, especially while standing
- While brushing your teeth
- When coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting, climbing stairs, straining

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU PRACTICE YOUR PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES?

- To start with, do 5 in a series, holding each muscle contraction for 5 seconds, then releasing.
- Do 50 a day for the rest of your life.

HINTS TO GET YOU STARTED

- Do pelvic floor exercises as often as you can. The more you do them, the faster you'll feel the results.
- Pick an activity you do often as a reminder. For instance, do pelvic floor exercises every time you chat on the phone. Or, during every television commercial. The important thing is to find a behavioral cue to use as a regular reminder.