

## **Pelvic Floor: Muscle Exercises - Inner Strength for Women of All Ages**

Author: Cynthia Neville, PT

The pelvic floor muscles support the internal pelvic and abdominal organs. They form a bowl or diamond shaped sling from the pubic bone in front to the tailbone in back, and from the right and left side of the inner pelvic bones. They also form a figure-8 around the rectum, vagina and urinary opening (urethra). Exercises for these muscles are commonly known as Kegel exercises, and they may decrease or eliminate symptoms of urinary urgency or leakage (incontinence).

### **Identify Pelvic Floor Muscles**

The easiest way to identify pelvic floor muscles is to squeeze or contract the muscles used to stop the flow of urine.

- Do not try this when the bladder is very full, for instance, first thing in the morning.
- Do not continue to do it after you have recognized the muscle. It can prevent proper emptying of the bladder and may lead to urinary tract infections.

Another way to identify the correct muscles is to insert a clean finger into the vagina and squeeze it. Also, squeeze the muscles around the anus as if trying to avoid passing gas.

Many women are not able to perform pelvic floor muscle contractions correctly, and performing them incorrectly can lead to increased symptoms.

### **Benefits of Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises**

- Strengthen pelvic floor muscles
- Improve bladder and bowel control and prevent bladder control problems
- Support the spine and prevent low back pain
- Increase the support of pelvic and abdominal organs and prevent organ prolapse
- Improve sexual response and orgasm
- Prevent or reduce constipation
- Prevent hemorrhoids
- Prevent injuries of the perineum during childbirth
- Prevent incontinence after childbirth
- Increase blood flow to the vagina, rectum and perineum, to aid in healing.

### **Performing Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises**

Once pelvic floor muscles are identified, practice contracting and relaxing the muscles to strengthen them.

- Tighten in the front and the back (around the anus) all together to make the entire muscle group contract.
- Try NOT to contract the abdominal and buttock muscles too much when exercising the pelvic

floor muscles.

- Continue breathing normally. Do not hold the breath.
- When contracting the pelvic floor muscles, feel them move **upwards and in**. When finished contracting, or when relaxing the muscles, feel them move **downwards and out**.
- Practice contracting and relaxing muscles in different positions, such as sitting, standing and lying down, and during activities such as lifting, pushing and reaching.

### **Daily Exercise Program**

Perform three to six sets of exercises daily. Do a set of long holds and a set of quick flicks at different times each day, sitting, standing or lying down.

#### **Long holds**

- Contract the pelvic floor muscles and hold the contraction for several seconds.
- Start by holding for five seconds, resting for five seconds and repeating 10 -15 times.
- Once it is easy to hold for five seconds, increase to seven seconds, 10 -15 times.
- Then try holding each contraction for 10 seconds, 10 -15 times with rests between contractions. If it is hard to hold for 10 seconds, try “pumping” the contraction as you are holding it; squeeze a few extra times during the 10 seconds without letting go.
- *Hint: A good time for these exercises is after urinating while washing your hands.*

#### **Quick flicks**

- Squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles quickly and strongly (try to minimize abdominal and buttock contraction).
- Hold this squeeze for two seconds, then let go. Be sure to fully let go and relax the muscle each time.
- Repeat 10 -15 times each set.

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