

# Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

FACT SHEET

Bladder control depends on muscles working together when the bladder is filling. The bladder muscle should be relaxed when it is filling. The muscles around the urethra (the tube that urine passes through), called the pelvic floor muscles, should be contracted during filling. Exercises that strengthen the pelvic floor muscles can help hold urine inside the bladder. This prevents leaks by increasing the firmness of the pelvic floor muscles. These are called pelvic floor muscle, or Kegel exercises, named after the doctor who developed them.

## Where is your pelvic floor?

You need to find your pelvic floor muscle to be sure you strengthen the right muscle. Your doctor may show you or teach you this during a physical exam. When contracting the muscle, men will feel a pulling in of the anus and movement of the penis. Women will feel a slight pulling in the rectum and vagina. Try this to help find your pelvic floor muscle:

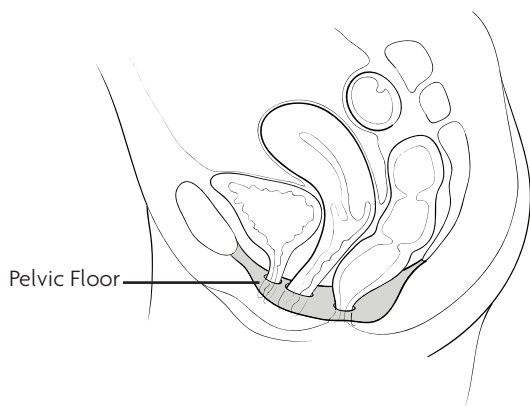
- Everyone, at one time or another has been in a crowded room and felt as if he or she were going to pass gas or wind. Imagine that this

is happening to you. Most of us will try to squeeze the muscles of our anus to prevent the passing of gas. The muscles being squeezed are your pelvic floor muscles. If you feel a pulling sensation at the anus, you are using the right muscles.

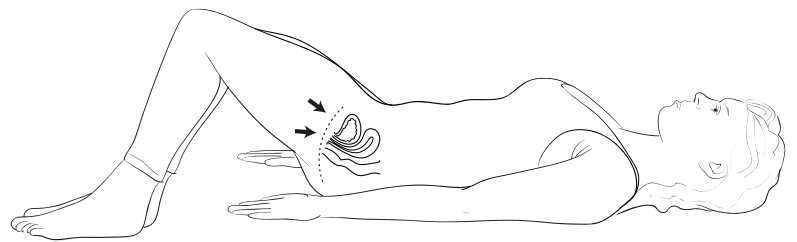
## Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles

Exercise increases the strength of your pelvic floor muscles, so that they will be strong enough to prevent urine leakage. With repeated practice, you gain control over these muscles. Then you can use them quickly to prevent urine loss or to decrease the urge feeling.

In each exercise, you squeeze and then relax your pelvic floor muscles. Squeeze the muscles for three seconds and then relax the muscles for three seconds. You must allow the muscles to relax fully before squeezing again. You should complete at least 60 pelvic floor exercises a day. You can do 30 in the morning when you get up and 30 at night. Remember, each squeeze and relaxation counts as one exercise. Do these exercises in different positions every day; 10 lying down, 10 sitting and



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10 standing. In the beginning, you may need to set aside time to concentrate while you do the exercises. Any activity that you perform regularly on a daily basis can be used to remind you to do your Kegel exercises. These can be done during the day when you are doing other activities as well.

You should build to 10 second contractions of your pelvic floor muscles. Remember to squeeze and count slowly 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 and relax the muscle and count 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. Work up to 45 exercises twice a day.

## Using your pelvic muscle to control the urge

Urges to use the bathroom can come and go without you emptying the bladder; they are simply messages telling you that eventually you will need to urinate. In someone with overactive bladder, the urges are often false messages that you need to go now. Urges, should be an early warning system, getting you ready to find a place to urinate after you have relaxed and suppressed the urge.

To reduce or eliminate the urge to urinate, you will use your pelvic floor muscles. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly several times when you get the urge feeling. To do this, tighten and relax the pelvic muscle as rapidly as possible. Do not relax fully in between squeezes. Squeezing your pelvic floor muscles in this way sends a message to your nervous system and back to your bladder to stop contracting. As your bladder stops contracting and starts relaxing, the urge feeling lessens. Then, once the urge goes away, you have a safe period when the bladder is calm. This calm period is the best time to go the bathroom.

## Make pelvic floor exercise part of your life

Pelvic floor muscle support usually improves within six weeks after starting the exercises, and three months should bring significant changes. Over active bladder symptoms improve slowly, so keeping track of improvement is important.

Make the exercises part of your daily lifestyle so that exercising becomes a habit, almost like a reflex action! Tighten the muscle when you walk, before you cough, as you stand up, and on the way to the bathroom. Try to always tighten your muscle when you get a strong urge that you cannot control. Do your exercises when:

- standing at the sink and brushing your teeth
- you get up in the morning
- you are washing dishes
- putting on your make-up
- sitting in the car at a stop light
- sitting and having dinner
- reading a book in bed
- watching TV during each commercial
- going for a walk
- you open the refrigerator
- talking on the phone
- having sex

You do not have to keep a formal count of the number of times you do each exercise just do it several times in a row. Do them often enough to make them a habit for a strong and healthy pelvic floor!

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