

Kegel Exercises

How to Strengthen Your Pelvic Muscles

An obstetrician named Dr. Arnold Kegel originally described pelvic floor muscle exercises. Their purpose is to strengthen the pelvic floor muscle supporting the urethra and bladder in order to prevent the accidental loss of urine during physical exertion (i.e. sneezing, coughing, laughing, running, or exercising). This type of loss of urinary control is called **Urinary Stress Incontinence**, and can have a considerable impact on a woman's overall quality of life and well-being.

The main pelvic floor muscle is called the 'levator' muscle and when contracted helps to stop the flow of urine, prevent passing gas or a bowel movement, and tighten the vagina during intercourse. The levator muscle forms the floor of the pelvis and supports the urethra, vagina, and rectum. It consists of two types of muscle fibers: "slow-twitch" (70%) and "fast-twitch" (30%). Both muscle fiber types should be exercised to improve the muscle's tone and ability to rapidly contract when 'stressed'.

Method: Place two fingers just inside the vagina and feel the squeeze to identify the muscle. Do not squeeze the abdominal, thigh, or buttocks muscles. Just focus on squeezing or tightening your urethra, vagina, and anal muscle. If you are squeezing the levator muscle correctly, the flow of urine will slow or stop.

A strong levator muscle improves bladder function in two important ways:

1. Improves stress incontinence. During a sudden cough or sneeze, the pelvic floor muscles contract, supporting the bladder and decreasing the accidental loss of urine. The stronger the muscle, the better the control.
2. Suppresses the 'urge' to urinate. When you feel an inconvenient urge to urinate contract the levator muscle (*slow-twitch* exercise below). There is an immediate nerve impulse sent to the bladder to relax the bladder tone and therefore, the sense of urgency. The stronger your levator muscle, the greater the nerve stimulation to relieve the urge sensation.

Two types of exercise are necessary to achieve maximum strength of the levator muscle and should be performed every time you finish urinating. These should be used on alternating days.

'Slow-Twitch' Exercise

Squeeze your levator muscle and hold it tight for a slow count of five seconds, relax, and repeat again for a total of five (5) contractions. (Remember, do not tighten your thigh, abdominal, or buttocks muscles; tighten only your levator muscle). As you gradually strengthen your pelvic muscle, work your way up to twenty (20) contractions.

'Fast-Twitch' Exercise

Quickly contract and relax your levator muscle 30 to 50 times, relax for ten seconds, and repeat again for a total of two to three sets. You may only be able to start out with a total of 30 "quick flicks". Over a period of a few weeks you will be able to increase the number up to a total of 200.

6-8 weeks of *consistently* performing these exercises will result in a definite improvement.

Don't quit, when you no longer leaking urine.

Every time you go to the bathroom and after you finish urinating (before you stand up), perform either one of the above levator muscle exercises (alternate each time or each day). Remember, this is now part of your **normal** urinating routine. It is what you do every time you go to the bathroom. It is like any isometric exercise. If you don't exercise this muscle regularly, it will become weak again and your symptoms will return. Many patients with urinary stress incontinence have cured their symptoms completely by performing these exercises.

