

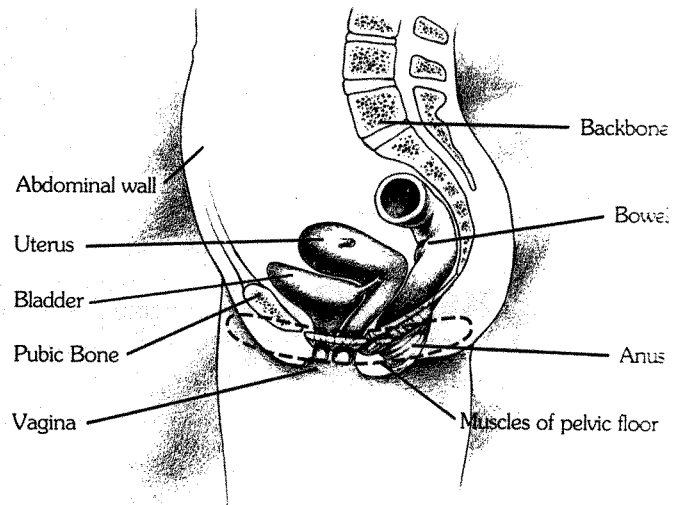
Exercises to Strengthen the Pelvic Floor (Kegel Exercises)

Introduction

Your doctor believes that pelvic floor exercises can help you improve your bladder control. When done properly and regularly, this series of three exercises – also called Kegel Exercises – can build up and strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor to help you hold your urine.

What is the pelvic floor?

Layers of muscle stretch like a hammock from the pubic bone in the front to the end of the backbone (see diagram). These firm, supportive muscles are called the pelvic floor and they hold the bladder and bowel, as well as the uterus in women, in place.



How does the pelvic floor work?

The muscles of the pelvic floor are firm and slightly tense to control the flow of urine from the bladder, or faeces from the bowel. When you urinate, or have a bowel movement, these muscles relax.

Afterward, they tighten again and stay that way to restore control.



Pelvic floor muscles can sag, however, because of an injury, lack of exercise, childbirth, or just getting older. When this happens, there is less control and urine and faeces can leak.

How can pelvic floor exercises help?

Pelvic floor exercises can help strengthen the pelvic hammock so it will once again give support. This will help you improve your bladder control and reduce or stop the leaking of urine.

Learning to do pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic hammock. Make sure you learn how to do all three exercises the right way – and check from time to time that you are still doing each exercise correctly.

Exercise 1 Imagine trying to stop yourself from passing wind from the bowel. To control the wind you must squeeze the muscle around the anus. Try squeezing that muscle as if you really did have wind. Do it now. You should be able to feel the muscle move. The buttocks and thighs should not move at all. You should be aware of the skin around the anus tightening and the anus being pulled up and away from whatever you are sitting on. Really try to feel this.

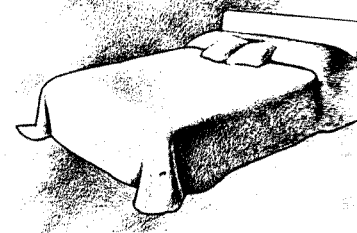
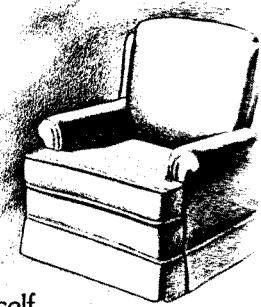
Exercise 2 Now imagine that you are sitting on the toilet passing urine. Picture yourself trying to stop the stream of urine. Really try to stop it. Try doing that now as you are reading. You should be using the same group of muscles that you used in Exercise 1, but you may have found it easier to control the bowel wind. Stopping the stream of urine can be harder to do because of the higher pressures which the bladder can produce.

Next time you go to the toilet to pass urine, try this "stop test" about half way through emptying your bladder. Once you have stopped the flow of urine, relax again and allow the bladder to empty completely. You may only be able to slow down the stream because your muscles are weak. Don't worry; they will improve and strengthen with time and exercise. If the stream of urine speeds up when you try to do this exercise, you are squeezing the wrong muscles.

Do not get into the habit of doing the "stop test" every time you pass urine. This exercise should be done only once a day at the most.

Exercise 3 Next imagine lying on your back on a bed with your legs bent and knees wide apart. Imagine that someone is trying to stick a pin into the area between the vagina and anus (or just in front of the anus if you are a man.) Really see that pin in your mind's eye and try to pull that specific area back inside your body and away from the pin by tightening the pelvic floor muscles. Pull in hard. Do not move your legs or hold your breath, and keep your bottom fixed on the bed.

Try this exercise in bed the next time you get the chance. At first there may not be much movement, but if you use a mirror to watch what happens, you will begin to see the anal skin wrinkle and move forward. You may find it helpful to place your finger on the area and feel the skin move as you tighten and then relax the muscles. Work hard to do this exercise the right way.



A Few Simple Rules to Remember

Now that you know how to do the exercises:

- 1** Do them properly – check often to be sure that you are using the correct muscles. Do the "stop test" only once a week to check on your progress.
- 2** Do them regularly – 10 times a day, do equal numbers of fast and slow exercises. Add on to the number of exercises you do at each time, and add on to the number of times you exercise each day, until you are up to 300 or 400 pelvic floor exercises a day.
- 3** Do them intelligently – learn to use the muscles when you need them the most, especially during times of stress, excitement, or when you feel you need better bladder control.
- 4** Keep on doing them – muscles work best when they are exercised. Once you have learned how to improve your bladder control, continue to do the exercises to keep the pelvic hammock in good shape.
- 5** Watch your weight – keeping yourself fit also means staying at your best weight.
- 6** Drink plenty of liquids – 6 to 8 glasses of water every day. And don't fall back into the habit of going to the toilet "just in case". Go only when you feel the need to pass urine.

Do you have any questions?

This information sheet is designed to teach you how to control your bladder, so that you'll be dry and comfortable. If you have problems doing the exercises, or if you don't understand any part of this information sheet, ask your doctor for help.

Do the Kegel Exercises regularly. Have faith in them. You should begin to see good results in a few weeks.

For further information about coping with incontinence, contact:

The Simon Foundation of Canada
P.O. Box 264
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E2