

Pelvic Floor Exercise Instructions (Kegals)

The muscles that support and surround the vagina, bladder neck and rectum make up the pelvic floor and contribute to the support and continence functions of these organs. These muscles like any others in our bodies can be strengthened through regular, focused exercise. These exercises were first popularized by Dr. Arnold Kegal in 1948 and are therefore often called “Kegal” exercises. One must be patient, as with any form of exercise, it may take a period of time to see the desired effect. Research suggests that up to 80% of patients, who adhere to a regular pelvic floor exercise program, will experience at least some improvement in symptoms.

Begin by emptying your bladder. Wear comfortable clothing and lie down with your head slightly elevated with your knees bent and comfortable.

It is important that you begin by understanding the difference between the two states of complete muscle contraction and complete muscle relaxation. To practice this, try tensing your fist into a tight ball to the count of five. Now completely relax your hand to the count of ten and note the difference. Before you begin, try relaxing all of the muscles in your body especially those of your legs and buttocks by focusing on your breathing and letting go.

To isolate and contract only your pelvic floor, just as you did with your fist, try to concentrate on the area surrounding your vagina and draw the muscles together quickly as though you are trying to squeeze on a tampon or bowel movement. Occasionally women find it helpful to place a finger in the vagina and squeeze upon it. Make sure that you are not using your buttocks to do this but are using only your pelvic floor.

Once you have pulled these muscles together quickly and deliberately, actively hold the contraction for 10 seconds. Relax completely after the contraction subsides for at least 15 seconds before beginning another pelvic floor contraction.

Once you begin these exercises, you may notice that your pelvic muscles tire very easily and that you are not able to hold the contraction for a full 10 seconds. Do not become discouraged, for as you continue this will become less of a problem. Occasionally rest periods of 30 seconds will help. If you feel that the muscle is no longer responding it is important not to keep trying for the remainder of the 10 second interval but to let them relax. What you are trying to do is gain control and strength in these muscles. By retightening or “flicking” the muscle you will not be as successful, so relax, gather your strength, and begin again.

A helpful exercise regimen is as follows:

To the count of 10 seconds:

1. Contract deliberately, quickly and hard.
2. Actively hold the contraction, hard and firm.
3. Hold it, hard and firm.
4. Hold it, hard and firm.
5. Hold it, hard and firm.
6. Hold it, hard and firm.
7. Hold it, hard and firm.
8. Hold it, hard and firm.
9. Hold it, hard and firm.
10. Relax completely.

Begin by doing 15 of these contractions each session (day) three times a week every other day. Add 10 contractions at the end of each month until you build up to 35 contractions in a session.

The next question is *when* to exercise. You may have heard rumors such as “at a stoplight”; or “while watching television”. Like any exercise, you will only get out what you put in. Part of that is the commitment to doing it *regularly*. This works best when you have a schedule or do it with an activity that you do regularly such as brushing your teeth. A suggestion that works for many is to do a set of exercised *every time* following emptying your bladder or having a bowel movement. This is the perfect time as 1) it happens 8-10 times a day, 2) you are disrobed and can identify the muscles should you need to, 3) it helps to empty the urethra of the urine left after voiding reducing the dribble some women have after voiding. Either way, pick a time and activity that prompts you to do these exercises regularly and you will see the benefit. Success is entirely up to you. Good Luck!