

Continence Program for Women

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KEGEL EXERCISES

Kegel, or pelvic muscle exercises are done to strengthen the muscles that support the bladder, urethra and vagina. Often the pelvic floor muscles are weak which contributes to problems with losing urine. Learning how to “activate” or contract these muscles properly can help prevent urine loss from occurring. It takes time and effort to strengthen these muscles. This means that it may take several weeks to months before you will see an improvement.

How to Identify the Correct Muscles

To find the muscles you need to exercise, place your index finger into your vagina and try to lift your finger upward with the muscles of your vagina. Alternatively, imagine that you have a tampon in your vagina that is falling out and you must tighten your muscles in order to hold it in.

Do not be discouraged if you do not feel a strong lift at first. We want to first make sure you are doing the exercises correctly. Your muscles will become stronger as you do more exercises. Remember, it is very important that you never use your stomach, legs or buttocks muscles or hold your breath when you contract your muscles. The most common mistake is using too many muscles.

Doing the Exercise

Pelvic exercises can be done in many different ways. We will give you instructions on how to do two types of exercises.

1. LIFT the pelvic floor muscles and hold for a count of 5 seconds. Then relax for a count of 10 seconds. This is called a ***holding contraction***. Repeat this lift five times hourly during your waking hours.
2. Next, activate the pelvic muscles and hold for 1 to 2 seconds in an on and off sequence three times. This is called a ***flick contraction***. Perform these types of exercises after you have finished performing the holding contractions.
3. Do not be discouraged if you cannot hold the lift for more than a few seconds at a time initially or if your efforts is very weak. This is quite typical. This muscle is not one that we regularly use, so be patient with yourself. With practice, your ability to hold a contraction will improve.
4. Start by practicing these exercises lying down. Maintain normal breathing at all times. When you feel more comfortable with them, you can do them in a sitting and

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eventually a standing position.

5. If your muscles get tired during your initial practice sessions, continue to do the holding contraction for 5 seconds and do three contractions at a time. Gradually, as you gain endurance, you will be able to do this five times an hour.
6. You should also perform a pelvic muscle contraction during sneezing, coughing, lifting or bending to help prevent urine leakage. Start the contraction immediately prior to exertion, and hold it steady throughout the exertion. Although you may not be able to prevent urine loss completely, you may greatly reduce the amount of leakage.
7. If you feel a strong urge to empty your bladder, relax and begin contracting slowly – do a holding contraction for 5 seconds, relax for 5 seconds and repeat 4 more times. Your first few efforts may increase the urge momentarily, but eventually it will decrease the urge. Then, if you need to empty your bladder, walk calmly at a normal pace to the bathroom.

When Will I Notice an Improvement?

You may notice a slight decrease in urinary incontinence after about two weeks of consistent, hourly exercise. You will see an even bigger difference within one month, however, it may take up to six months, if your muscles are very weak to begin with. If these exercises work, you will need to continue to practice them indefinitely. The statement “use it, or lose it!” is particularly true with respect to the pelvic muscles and their role in maintaining continence.

These exercises cannot harm you in any way. You may feel some muscle soreness as your body adjusts to this new activity. In time, you will learn to practice these exercises effortlessly. Eventually, they will become a part of your daily activity. Remember, in order to receive and maintain the maximum benefit from these exercises, it is important that you continue to do them on a daily basis.