

What You Should Know About Strengthening Pelvic Floor Muscles: Kegel Exercises

Kegel exercises are often recommended for women who experience urine leakage, or incontinence. Consistent Kegel repetitions may improve bladder control within a few weeks.

Reasons for urine leakage include pregnancy, childbirth, aging, or being overweight. When the pelvic floor muscles are weakened, there may be a loss of urine when a person cannot reach a bathroom quick enough or during laughing, coughing, exercising, or getting up from a chair.

What are Kegel exercises?

In the 1950s, Dr Arnold H. Kegel proposed exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that support the bladder, uterus, and bowel. While there are several options for treating or managing incontinence (from wearing protective pads, use of devices, injections, and/or medication, to surgery) Kegel exercises are a good technique to make the pelvic muscles stronger. When these muscles become stronger, there will be less leaking of urine.

How are Kegel exercises done?

Start by finding the right muscles. Lie down and insert a finger into the vagina. Squeeze as if you are stopping urine from coming out. If you feel tightening on your finger, these are the muscles for pelvic exercises. Another method for finding the right muscles is to stop urine midstream while on the toilet and becoming aware of the muscles being used (but do not continue to practice exercises during urination).

The process for performing a Kegel exercise is this:

- First, empty your bladder.
- Tighten the pelvic muscles and hold for 10 seconds.
- Relax the muscles completely for 10 seconds.
- Repeat the process for about 5 minutes (or 10 sets), 3 times each day. The exercises can be done anywhere—standing, sitting, or lying down.

You can also try a single set at times when you are likely to leak, such as when getting up from a chair or having an urge to run to the bathroom.



What if I don't do them right?

Don't give up if you don't have results after a few weeks. However, if you are not sure you are doing the exercise correctly, consult your clinician. Biofeedback is a method to monitor the contractions. A clinician can help find the right muscles to perform Kegel exercises or suggest other exercise aids.

Don't go overboard and do more than the recommended sets. This will not speed up progress and may instead cause muscle fatigue, which may increase leakage.

Additional Information

The following websites have more information about Kegel exercises:

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003975.htm

http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/bcw_ez/insertC.htm

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