

## Pelvic floor muscle training exercises

### Definition

Pelvic floor muscle training exercises are a series of exercises designed to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor.

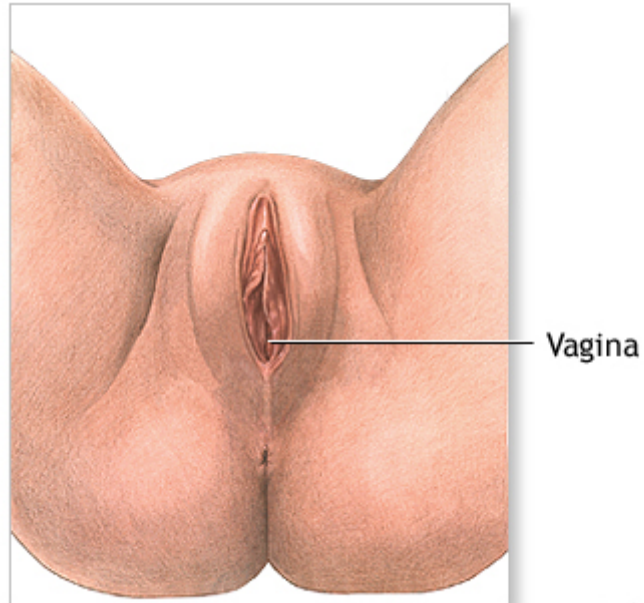
### Alternative Names

Kegel exercises

### Information

Pelvic floor muscle training exercises are recommended for:

- Women with urinary stress incontinence
- Men with urinary stress incontinence after prostate surgery
- People who have fecal incontinence



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Pelvic floor muscle training exercises can help strengthen the muscles under the uterus, bladder, and bowel (large intestine). They can help both men and women who have problems with urine leakage or bowel control.

A pelvic floor muscle training exercise is like pretending that you have to urinate, and then holding it. You relax and tighten the muscles that control urine flow. It is important to find the right muscles to tighten.

The next time you have to urinate, start to go and then stop. Feel the muscles in your vagina, bladder, or anus get tight and move up. These are the pelvic floor muscles. If you feel them tighten, you have done the exercise right. Do not make it a habit to do the exercises each time while you urinate. Once you can comfortably identify the muscles, perform the exercises while seated, but NOT when you are urinating.

If you are still not sure whether you are tightening the right muscles, keep in mind that all of the muscles of the pelvic floor relax and contract at the same time. Because these muscles control the bladder, rectum, and vagina, the following tips may help:

- Women: Insert a finger into your vagina. Tighten the muscles as if you are holding in your urine, then let go. You should feel the muscles tighten and move up and down.
- Men: Insert a finger into your rectum. Tighten the muscles as if you are holding in your urine, then let go. You should feel the muscles tighten and move up and down. These are the same muscles you would tighten if you were trying to prevent yourself from passing gas.

It is very important that you keep the following muscles relaxed while doing pelvic floor muscle training exercises:

- Abdominal
- Buttocks (the deeper, anal sphincter muscle should contract)
- Thigh

A woman can also strengthen these muscles by using a vaginal cone, which is a weighted device that is inserted into the vagina. Then you try to tighten the pelvic floor muscles to hold the device in place.

If you are unsure whether you are doing the pelvic floor muscle training correctly, you can use biofeedback and electrical stimulation to help find the correct muscle group to work.

- Biofeedback is a method of positive reinforcement. Electrodes are placed on the abdomen and along the anal area. Some therapists place a sensor in the vagina in women or anus in men to monitor the contraction of pelvic floor muscles.
- A monitor will display a graph showing which muscles are contracting and which are at rest. The therapist can help find the right muscles for performing pelvic floor muscle training exercises.

## PERFORMING PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES:

Follow these steps:

1. Begin by emptying your bladder.
2. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles and hold for a count of 10.
3. Relax the muscles completely for a count of 10.
4. Do 10 repetitions, 3 to 5 times a day (morning, afternoon, and night).

You can do these exercises at any time and place. Most people prefer to do the exercises while lying down or sitting in a chair. After 4 to 6 weeks, most people notice some improvement. It may take as long as 3 months to see a major change.

After a couple of weeks, you can also try doing a single pelvic floor contraction at times when you are likely to leak (for example, while getting out of a chair).

A word of caution: Some people feel that they can speed up the progress by increasing the number of repetitions and the frequency of exercises. However, over-exercising can instead cause muscle fatigue and increase urine leakage.

If you feel any discomfort in your abdomen or back while doing these exercises, you are probably doing them wrong. Breathe deeply and relax your body when you do these exercises. Make sure you are not tightening your stomach, thigh, buttock, or chest muscles.

When done the right way, pelvic floor muscle exercises have been shown to be very effective at improving urinary continence.

There are physical therapists specially trained in pelvic floor muscle training. Many people benefit from formal physical therapy.

## References

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