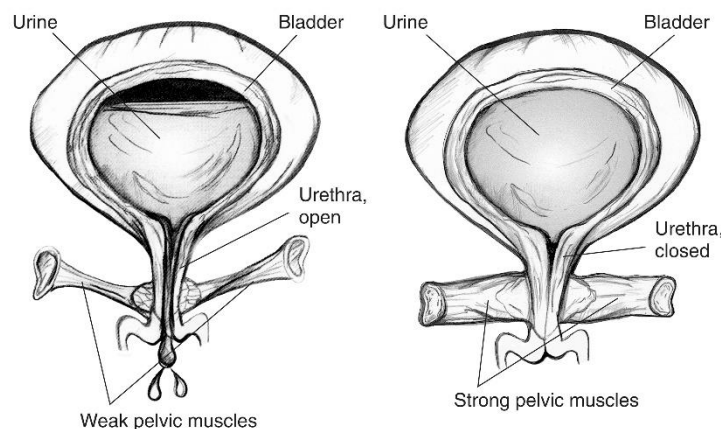


Kegels: Female Pelvic Floor Exercises

What are Kegel exercises?

Kegel exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles support the bladder and bowel openings. Strengthening the muscles of the pelvic floor can aid in preventing leakage of urine or feces when you cough, sneeze, lift, or do other stressful movements. Other benefits of Kegels include:

- Enhanced sexual function
- Conditioned muscles to make childbirth easier
- Decreased or prevention of prolapsed pelvic organs
- Improved ability to pass stool



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Who should do Kegel exercises?

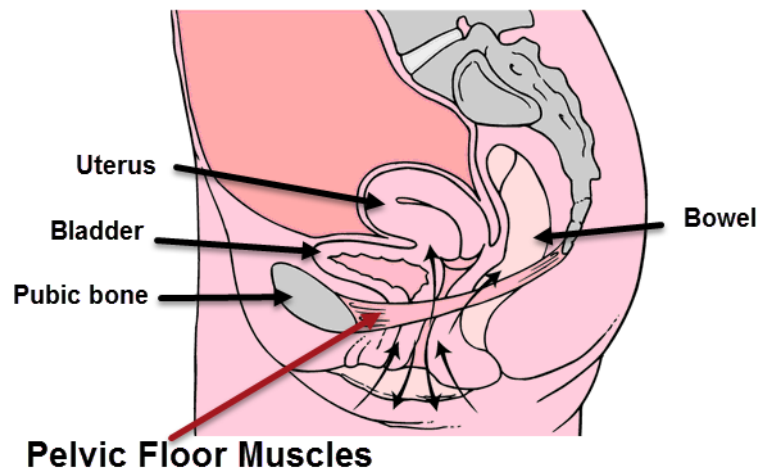
- Women with urinary and /or bowel incontinence
- Women who have demonstrated weakening of the pelvic floor
- Pregnant women or women who have previously had children
- Middle aged and older women

What do I need to know about Kegels?

Your success while doing Kegel exercises depends on you practicing them correctly and regularly. When doing the exercises, it is important to identify the correct muscles of the pelvic floor. At first, most people contract the abdominal or thigh muscles while forgetting the pelvic floor muscles. This could make pelvic floor tone and incontinence worse.

If you are not sure that you are doing the Kegel exercise correctly, ask your doctor to refer you to a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist (PT). The PT will evaluate you and provide specific instructions on how to do the exercises.

["Kegel exercises diagram"](#) by Gend27 - Own work. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) via Commons



You may do Kegels as part of biofeedback. Biofeedback consists of placing a sensor on the abdomen and around the anal area, which measures the tightening of the pelvic floor muscles. Occasionally, an electrode may be placed in your vagina.

How do I do Kegel exercises effectively?

Three (3) steps to an effective Kegel:

1. Squeeze muscles around the vagina and anal area
2. Tighten your vaginal and rectal muscles
3. Combine steps 1 and 2.

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
Kegels: Female Pelvic Floor Exercises:

When you perform steps 1 and 2 correctly, you should feel the muscles around your anus tighten. This is normal, but do try to tighten those muscles on purpose.

Detailed instructions for doing Kegel exercises

Step #1: The urethra—The Functional Stop Test

After partially emptying your bladder, stop your urine flow in a slow controlled manner, paying attention to how it feels.

Note: Stopping and starting the urine repeatedly as an exercise can be harmful and should not be done. Holding your urine can contribute to bladder infection, causing damage to normal urinary reflexes. The Functional Stop Test is useful for assessing what it feels like to gradually stop urine flow, but **do not do it more than once per week.**

Step #2: The vagina and rectum as your window to the pelvic floor

For this step, you will internally judge the ability to squeeze and elevate the muscles around the opening of your vagina, while lying on your back. Insert one finger into the vaginal opening while you try to lift and squeeze with the muscles. Pay attention to how this feels.

Note: For those who may be unable to check internally, you can place the pad of one finger on the perineal body (the area between the vagina and the anus) and assess for lift in this manner. The internal assessment gives you a better sense of what you are capable of doing with your pelvic floor and provides a way to measure the strength and control you gain as you progress with your Kegels.

Step #3: Putting it all together

Begin practicing while lying on your back with your knees bent, or lying back with pillows under your head and shoulders. When your knees are bent, you should have pillows under them so that the muscles around your hips and buttocks can relax. In this position, you can practice Kegels.

You will feel a combination of what you felt when you gradually stopped urine flow and the squeezing and elevating of your muscles around your vaginal area.

How long and how many do I do?

When you are first starting out, it is common to find that you can only hold a Kegel for 3-6 seconds and doing 3-6 repetitions causes muscle fatigue. When this happens, you are usually performing the exercise correctly. If you find you can hold it for much longer right away, recheck your technique. For patients with incontinence or pelvic floor weakness, it is important to focus on doing the technique correctly. You may be weak first starting out and gradually improve your muscle quality and tone.

Making Kegels a part of your life:

After you have become experienced in performing these exercises, you will want to do them as follows:

- A series of strong, steady squeezes for 8-10 seconds each
- 8-10 at a time
- 30 repetitions per day

As they get easier, you will find you can do them while sitting or standing, for example, you can do them while driving, working on the computer, or waiting in long lines.

Please note that you may not see any noticeable change in bowel or bladder control for a while. In some cases, it may take many months.

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Reviewer: Kim Erickson, PT

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