KEGEL EXERCISES

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What are pelvic muscle exercises? — Pelvic muscle exercises are exercises that strengthen the muscles that control the flow of urine and bowel movements. These exercises are also known as “Kegel” exercises. They can help keep you from leaking urine, gas, or bowel movements, if leaks are a problem for you. They can also help with a condition that affects women called “pelvic organ prolapse.” In women who have pelvic organ prolapse, the organs in the lower belly drop down and press against or bulge into the vagina.

How do I learn how to do Kegel exercises? — First ask your doctor or nurse how to do them right. He or she can help you get started.

You will need to learn which muscles to tighten. It is sometimes hard to figure out the right muscles.

A woman might learn to do Kegel exercises by:

- Putting a finger inside her vagina and squeezing the muscles around her finger; or
- Pretending that she is sitting on a marble and has to pick up the marble using her vagina

A man might learn to do Kegels by tightening his butt muscles as if he were holding back gas.

Both men and women can also learn to do Kegel exercises by stopping and starting the flow of urine. If you do this, make sure to do this only once or twice to figure out the correct muscles. Some doctors think you should not do this at all, because if you get in the habit of doing it, it could cause a bladder infection.

No matter how you learn to do Kegel exercises, the important thing to know is that the muscles involved are not in your belly or your thighs.

After you learn which muscles to tighten, you can do the exercises in any position (sitting in a chair or lying down). You do not need to do them while you are in the bathroom.

How often should I do the exercises? — Do the exercises 3 times a day, on 3 or 4 days a week. Each time, flex your muscles 8 to 12 times, and hold them tight for 6 to 8 seconds each time you tighten. Keep up this routine for at least 3 to 4 months. You will probably notice results, but it might take a little time.
**How do Kegel exercises help?** — Kegel exercises can help:

- Reduce urine leaks in people who have “stress incontinence,” which means they leak urine when they cough, laugh, sneeze, or strain
- Control sudden urges to urinate that happen to people with “urgency incontinence.” (Urgency incontinence is also known as urge incontinence.)
- Control the release of gas or bowel movements
- Reduce pressure or bulging in the vagina caused by pelvic organ prolapse. (If you have a bulge in the vagina, see your doctor or nurse to find out the cause.)

Kegel exercises might also reduce urine leaks in men who have had surgery to treat prostate cancer or an enlarged prostate.

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