

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Pelvic floor exercises include exercises to help support the pelvic floor as well as Kegel exercises.

Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles involved in closing the urethral sphincter. These are used to reduce leakage caused by stress incontinence and may help to control the sudden urge to urinate in women with urge incontinence. Studies have shown that, when done correctly, pelvic muscle exercises can reduce symptoms of mild stress incontinence.

Kegel exercises can be done anywhere, without anyone being aware that they are being performed. To perform them correctly, relax your abdomen, thighs and buttocks. Then contract the muscles of the pelvic floor by squeezing them upward and inward as if trying to control a strong urge to urinate. Hold the contraction for up to ten seconds, then release. Do ten long squeezes three times a day. It usually takes one to two months to notice an improvement. Do not perform Kegel exercises while urinating. It's possible to figure out which muscles are the correct ones by stopping the flow of urine but continued exercise this way can lead to problems with urinary retention.

Pelvic floor exercises also include core strength exercises as taught in Pilates or Yoga. By learning good posture, keeping the shoulder down and back, keeping the abdominal muscles tight and the gluteus muscles tight (buttocks), the pelvic floor improves and reduces the incidence of urinary incontinence and female genital prolapse.

Other aides to increasing muscle tone in the perineal region include using vaginal cones, biofeedback and electrical stimulation devices. Vaginal cones are weights that fit into the vagina and help women by accelerating the effects of the Kegels. Vaginal weights can be ordered at most medical supply stores or at www.vaginalweights.org

Biofeedback is taught by some physicians and some physical therapists. A computer is used to monitor a probe which is inserted into the patient's vagina, allowing her to watch the computer monitor and view the strength of the Kegel exercises. Instant feedback is the advantage of this system. A Kegel Master can be purchased online. When the patient squeezes correctly, the computer graphs an increase in pressure. When the Kegels are done incorrectly, the graph remains flat. Artificial electrical stimulation devices such as the Enovid system produce low levels of electric current to the pelvic floor muscles, causing them to contract automatically and increase the muscles strength. All of the methods can be used to increase the muscular control in the vagina and reduce genuine stress incontinence.