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## **Patient Instructions for Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises**

### ***Why do pelvic muscle exercises?***

Pelvic muscle exercises (also known as “Kegel” exercises) may help you improve your bladder & bowel control. Many studies have shown that women who perform these exercises regularly may avoid medical or surgical treatment. Pelvic muscle exercises have a lot going for them- they are free, simple, and you don’t have go to a health club to do them!

### ***What are the pelvic muscles?***

The muscles of the pelvis normally help to support the contents of the pelvis including the uterus, vagina, bladder, and rectum. The pelvic muscles form a hammock beneath the opening of the vagina & rectum are important in normal bladder, bowel, & sexual function. These muscles can be damaged through pregnancy, vaginal delivery, vaginal surgery, and aging.

### ***What is a pelvic muscle contraction?***

Like any muscles in your body, you can make your pelvic muscles stronger by exercising them regularly. When you squeeze your pelvic muscles trying to hold your urine or bowels, you are performing a pelvic muscle contraction.

### ***How do you contract your pelvic muscles?***

Many women have difficulty contracting their pelvic muscles. You must concentrate on squeezing the muscles which you would use to hold your urine or bowels. It is important not to hold your breath or squeeze your stomach, buttocks, or thigh muscles. Your doctor or nurse can help you to be sure that you are contracting the right muscles during an exam. During a contraction you should get the sense of your pelvic muscles pulling upward and a drawing-in sensation in your vagina. Don’t try to contract your muscles by stopping your stream of urine because this is almost impossible for most women, it & may lead to difficulty emptying your bladder.

Try to keep everything relaxed except the muscles right around the vagina. Breathe slowly and deeply. You should do the exercises either lying or sitting down. While it is possible to do the exercises while driving down the highway or in the middle of a busy office, it is better to focus on those activities & do them when you can concentrate on them for a couple of minutes. Here’s how to do a set of pelvic muscle contractions:

- Relax your breathing & focus on your pelvic muscles
- Slowly squeeze your pelvic muscles over 10 seconds
- Hold the muscles as hard as you can for a few seconds
- Slowly relax your muscles
- Rest a few seconds & start over

## ***Helpful Hints***

- Empty your bladder before exercising.
- Keep your legs together until you get used to exercising.
- Listen to music when you do the exercises - this can make it more fun!
- Some women find the mental image of an elevator rising up, stopping, & then lowering down again to be useful.

## ***How often should you do the exercises?***

You should start with a set of contractions 3 or 4 times per day. Ten to 15 contractions per set is a good starting point. It will take you about 2 or 3 minutes to do a set. Many women find it easy to remember to do the exercises around meal times or just before going to sleep or just after waking. You may also be referred to a formal physical therapy program in pelvic floor muscle strengthening.

## ***When will you see results?***

Don't get frustrated if you don't see immediate results. Like training any muscle in your body, it may take 6 to 8 weeks for you to see results. The more you put into these exercises, the more you will get out of them. It is a lot of work for you, but you may improve your lifestyle and, in some cases, avoid surgery. Your clinician can give you feedback about your progress and is available for questions.

## ***How long should you perform these exercises?***

After you have had a response to exercise therapy, you may be able to decrease the amount of exercises that you are performing, but you should continue to do them. The old adage of "use it or lose it" applies here- if you stop working on the muscles they will weaken & your problems may return. These exercises are even suggested after surgery for bladder & bowel control problems.

Once you get the hang of contracting your muscles you can try doing some different types of contractions. Instead of slow contractions, try squeezing your muscles fast & hard. You can also vary the time & number of the contractions. A little variety may keep you from getting bored.

## ***What else can you do to help your control?***

In addition to the exercises, many women find that such things as emptying regularly to avoid a full bladder & emptying prior to strenuous exercise or sex may help their urine leakage problem. For women with leakage mainly with exercise a tampon may also help.

## ***What if you can't contract the muscles?***

Women who have difficulty performing the exercises may benefit from biofeedback therapy. Biofeedback therapy may involve working with a therapist to help you identify the muscles or working with vaginal weights. If you are having difficulty contracting your pelvic muscles your clinician will discuss whether either of these options may help you.

**Please call us at 828.670.5665 (extension 313 or 315) in 4 weeks to let us know how you are doing.**  
***Good Luck!***