

KEGEL EXERCISES

Kegel exercises are muscle-strengthening maneuvers aimed at strengthening the muscles supporting the rectum and vagina. These exercises may help in controlling the leakage of stool, or may help to tighten the tissues around the vagina.

One of the muscles of the pelvic floor is called the pubococcygeal, or PC, muscle. It is a thick, U-shaped band that runs from the pubic bone at the front of the pelvis to the coccyx, or tail bone, at the back. It is this muscle that is strengthened during Kegel exercises.

The Kegel Exercise Program

The success of Kegel exercises depends on correct technique and a commitment to perform the exercises regularly.

To find your PC muscle, try to stop the flow of urine when you urinate. The muscle that you must contract to do this is the PC muscle. Notice that, although the abdominal and rectal muscles contract at the same time, it is the PC muscle that stops the flow of urine.

For women: Another way to find the PC muscle is to put two fingers into your vagina and open them slightly. If this is difficult, use a lubricant such as KY Jelly on your fingers to ease insertion. Now squeeze your PC muscle enough to close your fingers.

After you know where the muscle is and feel some control over it, try performing these Kegel exercises. The exercises can easily be done lying down, sitting, or standing.

The Long-Cycle Exercise

1. Contract (squeeze) the PC muscle for 10 seconds.
2. Relax the PC muscle for 10 seconds.
3. Repeat both steps 15 times. After completion of the long-cycle exercise, relax for 30 seconds, then start the short-cycle exercise.

The Short-Cycle Exercise

1. Contract the PC muscle for one second, then relax for one second.
2. Do each contraction and relaxation 10 times.
3. Repeat both steps 15 times

Breathe normally to avoid tensing other muscles when doing Kegel exercises. Counting out loud may help. It is just as important to relax the PC muscle as it is to contract. By doing both, you strengthen the muscle and make it function more efficiently.

Do both long- and short-cycle exercises every day, eventually reaching 15 of both cycles daily. This will take about 10 minutes.

Most people notice a decrease in symptoms within a month after starting the exercises. If your PC muscle is very weak, you may not notice a difference for several weeks. If you see no change after doing the exercises for several weeks, contact your health care provider to ensure that you have properly identified the PC muscle and are correctly performing the exercises.

If you experience any discomfort when doing Kegel exercises, contact your health care provider. The discomfort could indicate a condition that needs further assessment.