



# Pelvic Floor Exercises

**INTRODUCTION** — The pelvic muscles work to control the release of urine. Like other muscles, they can become weakened over time as a result of childbirth, surgery, and aging. People with bladder control problems can improve urinary control through pelvic muscle exercises (also called Kegel exercises).

**PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISE TECHNIQUE** — The first step is to identify the correct muscles to contract. Women can do this by placing a finger in the vagina and squeezing the vaginal muscles around their finger. The muscles of the buttocks, abdomen, and thighs should not be used. Another way is for a woman to imagine that she is sitting on a marble. Imagine using the vaginal muscles to gently lift the marble off the chair. Some clinicians teach this exercise by having the patient stop the urine stream during urinating, but this is NOT recommended.

Second, hold the pelvic muscle contraction approximately 8 to 10 seconds, and then relax the muscles; adequate relaxation is as important as contraction. In the beginning, it may not be possible to hold the contraction for more than one second. Perform 8 to 12 contractions followed by relaxation three times. Try to do this every day, but no less than three or four times a week. The exercise regimen should be continued for at least 15 to 20 weeks. Over time, try to hold the contraction harder and for a longer time. These exercises need to be continued indefinitely to have a lasting effect, similar to other forms of exercise.

In patients whose muscles are weak, the exercises should initially be done while lying down. As the muscles become stronger, the exercises may be done while sitting or standing. Contract these muscles during activities that can cause urine leakage, such as during physical exercise, lifting, coughing or sneezing.

**PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISE RESULTS** — Studies have shown that, if done correctly, pelvic muscle exercises can be effective in people with stress incontinence because the exercises improve muscle strength. This strength can also be used to stop a sudden urge to void that may result in urine leakage. If there is a sudden sense of urgency that may cause urine leakage, patients are advised to sit or stand still and contract the pelvic muscles. After the urge diminishes, the patient can then proceed to the toilet.

Most people notice an improvement after three to four months. It is important to continue the exercises in order to maintain bladder control. Patients with mild fecal leakage (leakage of stool) may have improvement in the amount and frequency of fecal leakage as well.