

PHYSICAL THERAPY FOR WOMEN

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THE BOTTOM LINE ON KEGELS

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I. EDUCATION:

- A. The pelvic floor muscles surround the vagina, rectum and urethra (urine tube). It stretches from pubic bone to tail bone forming a sling. These muscle are not connected to the leg muscles
- B. The pelvic floor muscles are voluntary muscles that can be improved with exercise.
- C. The functions of these muscles are:
 - 1. SUPPORTIVE and
 - 2. SPHINCTERIC.
The muscle supports (holds up) the bladder, uterus and rectum.
The muscle closes off the opening when we cough, laugh, and sneeze to prevent leakage.
- D. The muscle is made up of two different types of fibers:
 - 1. Long Hold or Marathoners: provide Support to hold the organs up all day.
 - 2. Short Hold or Sprinters: provide Sphincter Control to quickly close of the urethra and prevent leaking with cough or sneeze.

II. DEFINITIONS OF INCONTINENCE:

*First discuss your symptoms of incontinence with your physician

- A. **STRESS INCONTINENCE:** The loss of urine with cough, laugh sneeze, exercise etc. Or any activity that suddenly increases belly pressure.
- B. **URGE INCONTINENCE:** The sudden uncontrollable urge to go to the bathroom - can't make it to the bathroom on time.
- C. **MIXED INCONTINENCE:** A mixture of stress and urge symptoms.
- D. **FREQUENCY:** Urinating more than 7 times per day.
- E. **OVERFLOW INCONTINENCE:** This type of incontinence is happens with conditions like diabetes or paraplegia. The bladder fills without the patient feeling the need to urinate and literally "overflows".
- F. **FUNCTIONAL INCONTINENCE:** A physical handicap or weakness which makes the patient move slower and makes it hard to get to the bathroom on time. For example a patient with recent hip surgery may not have a bladder problem but is still unable to make it to the bathroom or leaks on the way to the bathroom because she walks slowly.

There are two main factors that will improve your strength:

1. Doing Kegels exercises correctly and consistently
2. Avoiding activities that strain or weaken the pelvic floor muscles

III. SELF EVALUATION TECHNIQUES:

A. STOP URINE TEST:

1. Do this test once a month to evaluate your progress
2. Do not do this test first thing in the morning
3. If you can stop your urine in midstream without any leaks drips or dribbles, you have a 3/5 muscle grade
4. If you try to stop the flow of urine in midstream and some still leaks and drips through, you have a 2/5 muscle grade
5. If you can stop your urine flow quickly and easily, you have a 5/5

A muscle grade determines the ability of the muscle to withstand the force of gravity. Therefore, giving yourself a "muscle grade" in this case will help you decide if you need to do Kegel exercises lying down or sitting up

B. PARTNER EXERCISES OR SEXERCISE:

1. during any position of intercourse, try to tighten your vaginal muscles and ask your partner for feedback. Ask how long you can hold the contraction and how many times it can be repeated.
2. practice the exercises regularly and every 2-4 weeks ask your partner for feedback on how well you are progressing
This sets up a system of "biofeedback" and lets your partner tell you how well you are progressing with your exercises. Practicing Kegels exercises during intercourse will improve the strength of the vaginal muscles

C. DIGITAL SELF EXAM:

1. insert your fingers in your vagina and tighten your vaginal muscles
2. feel the muscles tighten around your finger. Again determine how long you can hold and how many you can do.
*insert your finger up to the first knuckle and place your finger on the right or left so that you are touching the muscle.

D. VIEWING IN THE MIRROR:

1. Do a Kegels exercise while looking at your vagina in a mirror
2. When you do a Kegel the perineum should close and move up and away from the mirror. If you see anything moving toward the mirror during your Kegel exercise, you are doing the wrong thing. Stop exercising and get individual instruction from your doctor or therapist.

Record your muscle grade, how long you can hold and how many you can do on the worksheet in the back of this booklet.

Physicians and physical therapists may test your muscles with their finger in the vagina/ rectum and/or with a biofeedback device that records muscle activity.

IV. EXERCISE

A. CHOOSE YOUR POSITION:

1. 1/5 (very weak) muscle
 - a. choose a position that is “gravity assist” or where gravity is helping you.
 - b. Your bottom is higher than your head.
 - c. For example, placing 2 pillows under your hips or like babies sleep with their bottom up in the air.
2. 2/5 (weak) muscle:
 - a. Choose a position that eliminates gravity or where your spine is parallel to the floor or you are neutral with gravity.
 - b. For example laying on your back, side, belly, on all fours.
3. 3/5 (fair muscle)
 - a. Choose a position that is “antigravity” or upright.
 - b. For example sitting or standing.
4. 4/5 or 5/5 muscle grades,
 - a. do Kegels exercises while walking, running or during another activity.

- B. HOW LONG TO HOLD
1. Start with the number of seconds that you can hold the contraction.
 2. The results of the partner exercise or finger palpation.
- C. HOW LONG TO REST (HOLD: RELAX RATIO)
1. FOR WEAK MUSCLES (1/5 OR 2/5)
Double rest time: For example hold for 5 relax for 10
Hold for 2, relax for 4, Hold for 10 relax for 20
 2. FOR STRONGER MUSCLES (3/5 or better)
Equal work and rest: For example hold for 5 relax for 5
Hold for 2, relax for 2, Hold for 10 relax for 10.
- * It is very important to relax completely between each exercise to avoid spasm and pain.
- D. HOW MANY TO DO
- Start with the number of repetitions you could do on the partner or finger palpation test.
- F. HOW OFTEN
1. Do your exercises “little and often” if your muscles are weak, you want to avoid tiring the muscle. Do 3-5 repetitions 5 times/day
 2. Start doing a combination of exercises in the position that is correct for you.
- G. SAMPLE EXERCISE PROGRAM:
1. Morning:
5 repetitions of 2 second Hold and 4 second Relax
5 repetitions of 5 second Hold and 5 second Relax
5 repetitions of 10 second Hold and 10 second Relax
 2. Repeat the same set of exercises in the afternoon and at night (3 times/ day).
 3. Do exercises in lying down or sitting.
 4. Do the exercises during intercourse if possible.
 5. Mixing up the exercises further enhances muscle learning i.e. do the exercises randomly mixing up the 2, 5 and 10 second holds rather than doing all the short holds followed by the medium ones and then the long holds.

**** This is only a sample program. You must develop your own program depending on the results of your self test. The work sheet in the back of this booklet is designed to help you.**

H. MAKING THE EXERCISES HARDER

1. Do your exercises daily and do one of the self evaluation tests every month to see if you have improved a muscle grade.
2. If so, you have to increase the level of difficulty of the exercise to make them more challenging.
3. You can make the exercises more difficult by:
 - a. Changing your position: From buttock up (gravity assist) to lying down (gravity neutral) to sitting (antigravity).
 - b. Hold the contraction longer: Hold up to 10 seconds at a time
 - c. Decrease the rest time: Change to equal work and rest time. For example you can change from 3 second hold 6 second relax to 3 second hold 3 second relax.

V. EVERYDAY LIFE

- A. Now that you have learned how to do Kegels exercise, consider it a new SKILL that you need to use in your everyday life to DECREASE THE EVERYDAY DOWNWARD FORCES ON YOUR BOTTOM.
- B. If you can visualize your body like a box, the bottom of the box is your pelvic floor muscles and it may to fall out with the activities listed below. Kegels exercises with help “lift” the sagging bottom of the box.
- C. Equally important is the concept of avoiding constant downward pressure on the bottom.
 1. LIFTING: Exhale with effort, blow out as you lift. Do not hold your breath and push down as you lift heavy objects.
 2. CONSTIPATION: Bearing down when you have a bowel movement pushes down on the pelvic floor muscles and defeats the purpose of the Kegels exercises. Correct the cause of the constipation and discuss this with your physician.

3. **CHRONIC COUGH/SNEEZE:** allergies or “smoker’s cough” cause constant pressure on the pelvic floor. Discuss these symptoms with your physician and eliminate chronic cough and sneeze as much as possible.
COUNTER-BRACE when you do cough. Do a Kegel muscle contraction before you cough or sneeze.
4. **TRANSITIONAL MOVEMENTS:** Don’t hold your breath while getting up out of a chair or bed. You should breathe normally as you move from one position to another. Pull up your pelvic floor muscle when you get out of the chair.
5. **MODIFY THE WAY YOU EXERCISE:** Exercise should not cause bearing down i.e. you should not hold your breath during crunches/sit-ups” or while working with weights.
EXHALE WITH EFFORT.
**40% of the women exercising in health clubs are wearing a pad and are leaking urine during exercise. If you are one of these women stop and change the way you perform the exercise to avoid leakage.*

VI. THE BLADDER

- A. **NORMAL VALUES:** Remember all of us are different and “normal” values are just a yardstick for you to judge approximately how close you are to the yardstick. The numbers are not necessarily “the” goal to strive for. Please discuss your concerns with your physician.
 1. You should urinate about 7 times/day
 2. There should be about 2 to 5 hours between trips to the bathroom
 3. You should not get up more than 2 times/night to urinate
 4. You should drink 6-8 glasses of water/day
 5. You should not void just to avoid having accidents (“just-in-case”)
 6. You should not avoid drinking fluids to avoid having accidents.
 7. The amount of urine at each void should not be a “dribble”
You should be able to count to 10 seconds from the start to finish of bladder emptying.

B. BLADDER IRRITANTS:

The following can make you go to the bathroom more frequently and may make the leaking worse.

1. Try not to consume:
 - a. Caffeine
 - b. Soda/ pop
 - c. Artificial sweeteners
 - d. Alcohol
2. Smoking makes you cough more and nicotine irritates the bladder.
3. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day. Low water intake makes the urine concentrated and makes the bladder more irritable.

C. TO QUIET THE URGE:

1. The following is a list of tips to control symptoms of urgency, frequency and urge incontinence. Use these tips when you feel the “urge” to urinate and you are trying to delay voiding.
 - a. Stop and Sit - Applying perineal pressure “calms” the bladder down. Use your hand to apply perineal pressure or sit on a rolled up towel till the urge disappears.
 - b. Relax and Breathe - Visual Imagery. Try to “daydream” and think of calm scenery avoid getting nervous and “running” to the bathroom.
 - c. Distraction- Try to keep your mind busy by counting backwards in 7’s balancing your check book or getting immersed in a good book.
 - d. Puff and tuck - Do short Kegels contraction and short outward breaths. This helps the bladder to “calm” down.
2. Avoid triggers: Get away from events or things that make you want to urinate. Examples: seeing a toilet, listening to running water, immersing your hands in warm water, cold environments.

*Keep a voiding diary and determine your progress. Share with your physician or physical therapist.

VII. BELLIES and BOTTOMS:

The tummy muscle and the belly muscle are “pals”. They work well together. Gently pull the belly in while tightening the pelvic floor muscle. The belly should not do all the work, only a gentle bracing.

VIII. PHYSICAL THERAPY

Speak to your physical therapist or doctor about the treatments available in your area. Some of the treatments may include:

- Biofeedback
- Electrical Stimulation
- Vaginal Weights
- Individualized Kegel exercise program
- Treatment of pain

IX. REMEMBER:

- A. Do Kegels correctly every day.
- B. Avoid bearing down.
- C. Avoid bladder irritants.
- D. Avoid urinating “just in case”.

X. KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR PROGRESS

- A. Fill in the information below after you have completed the self evaluation tests. Write down your Kegel exercise program. Once per month re-evaluate the muscle and change your exercise program accordingly.

MY SELF EVALUATION

Date			
Stop Test	2/5 3/5 5/5	2/5 3/5 5/5	2/5 3/5 5/5
How long can I hold	sexercise, finger _____ seconds	sexercise, finger _____ seconds	sexercise, finger _____ seconds
How many can I do	_____ times	_____ times	_____ times
Viewing in mirror	tissue pulls in tissue pushes out	tissue pulls in tissue pushes out	tissue pulls in tissue pushes out

MY EXERCISE PROGRAM

Date			
Position	buttock up lying down sitting, standing	buttock up lying down sitting, standing	buttock up lying down sitting, standing
How long to hold	_____ seconds	_____ seconds	_____ seconds
How long to rest	_____ seconds	_____ seconds	_____ seconds
How many to do	_____ times	_____ times	_____ times
How often	3 4 5 6 /day	3 4 5 6 /day	3 4 5 6 /day
# of quick squeezes	_____ times	_____ times	_____ times

You should try to tighten the muscles strongly during each contraction. Each contraction should feel the same as the repetition before. The quality of the exercise is more important than the number that you perform. If you feel the quality of your exercise decline, for example starting to strain, bear down or using other muscles, stop your exercises and take a break.

ENDURANCE CONTRACTIONS—Goal: Contract 10 seconds, Relax 10 seconds, X's 10

Lift your pelvic floor muscles up and squeeze for the # of seconds indicated, then relax for the # of seconds indicated. Repeat this the # of times indicated below. Again, it is important that you do **not** hold your breath during these exercises. Avoid straining or holding your breath, or using other muscles while you exercise.

SUPPORTIVE (ENDURANCE) CONTRACTIONS

WEEK	EXERCISE
1	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
2	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
3	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
4	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
5	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
6	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
7	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
8	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
9	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
10	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
11	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
12	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
13	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
14	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
15	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
16	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
17	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___
18	___ seconds contract, ___ seconds relax, X's ___

QUICK CONTRACTIONS—Goal: Contract quickly , Relax quickly and completely, X's 60 sec.

This should be a very quick contraction and relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles. Begin with a belly breath, exhale, then contract your pelvic floor muscles hard and quickly. Relax , letting go quickly. Remember, never hold your breath. Do this exercise on the toilet **AFTER** you have finished urinating and using toilet paper.

QUICK FLICKS

WEEK	EXERCISE
1	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
2	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
3	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
4	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
5	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
6	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
7	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
8	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
9	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
10	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
11	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
12	quick contract, quick relax repeat for ___ seconds
