

Activating Your Pelvic Floor Muscles Using Kegels and Physical Therapy



What is a “Kegel” exercise?

A Kegel is a contraction of your pelvic floor muscles and is more accurately called a “pelvic floor muscle contraction” or “pelvic muscle exercise”. Performing a pelvic floor muscle contraction (Kegel) can assist with bladder and bowel control, since these muscles support the bladder, bowels, uterus, and rectum.

How do you perform a Kegel?

A proper pelvic floor muscle contraction involves a squeeze and lift of the pelvic floor muscles. The action is similar to what one would do if they wanted to stop the flow of urine and the passing of gas. No outward sign of effort should be visible if the pelvic floor muscles contract without the assistance of other muscles. The thighs, buttocks, and abdomen should remain relaxed and breathing should remain normal. These contractions can be performed while riding in a car, standing in line at the grocery store or reading a book.

If these contractions are difficult initially, perform them lying down and progress to sitting then standing and finally incorporate them with movement. Learning how to contract these muscles in a variety of positions and with functional tasks is most beneficial.



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Why perform a proper **Kegel**?

Sounds easy enough, but pelvic floor muscle contractions are actually harder to perform than one might think. Even following verbal instruction, 25%-50% of men and women perform pelvic floor muscle contractions incorrectly. People frequently say, “I tried Kegels and they didn’t work”. Muscles that are not exercised properly will not get stronger. Additionally, understanding how long to hold the contractions and how many to perform depends on the individual. An improper exercise technique or inappropriate program may make existing symptoms worse. Research shows that individualized instruction from a trained healthcare provider helps people learn how to activate these muscles most effectively for improved function.

How can **Physical Therapy (PT)** help?

If you find you are struggling to determine the right pelvic floor exercise program for you, ask your doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner for a referral to a Pelvic Health Physical Therapist (PT). Pelvic Health PTs have advanced training to identify the appropriate type and amount of pelvic muscle exercises you should be performing based on your current condition, to be successful. They may also identify other weak or tight muscles that may need exercise, and provide you with valuable education specific to your condition in order to maximize your results.

Who Should be Referred to a **Pelvic Health Physical Therapist (or commonly referred to as the Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist)**? If you have...

- Urine leakage during activity, sneezing, coughing, or laughing
- Urinary incontinence
- Bladder urgency or frequency
- Fecal (bowel) incontinence
- Constipation
- Pelvic Pain
- Painful sex
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Tailbone pain
- Women who are pregnant or following childbirth

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional healthcare.