

Kegel Exercises

Alternate Names: Pelvic Floor Exercises (PFEs), Pelvic Muscle Strengthening Exercises

Definition:

Kegel exercises are a series of pelvic muscle exercises designed to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor.

Description:

Kegel exercises were originally developed by Dr. Arnold Kegel in 1948 as a method of controlling incontinence in women following childbirth. Although his purpose was to help patients get better bladder control, there are many other significant benefits. Kegel spent 20 years researching the benefits of what has come to be called the Kegel Exercise, which strengthens the pubococcygeal -- the PC muscle -- that controls the pelvic area. These exercises are now recommended for anyone with pelvic floor instability.

The principle behind Kegel exercises is to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, thereby improving pelvic stability. The success of Kegel exercises depends on proper technique and adherence to a regular exercise program.

Some people have difficulty identifying and isolating the muscles of the pelvic floor. Care must be taken to learn to contract the correct muscles. Typically, most people contract the abdominal or thigh muscles, while not even working the pelvic floor muscles. These incorrect contractions may even worsen pelvic floor tone. Several techniques exist to help identify the correct muscles.

One approach is to stop the flow of urine midstream by contracting your pelvic floor muscles. Repeat this action several times until you become familiar with the feel of contracting the correct group of muscles. Another approach is to contract and hold the contraction of the pelvic floor muscles every time you are stopped at a stoplight. You should easily be able to repeat this exercise for 5-10 repetitions at every stoplight. You should perform these contractions at least 30 times a day, and up to 200 repetitions a day. Refrain from contracting your abdominal, thigh, or buttocks muscles while performing the exercise.

Kegeling provides many benefits:

- Improves pelvic stability, and decreased low back pain.
- It can prevent prolapses of pelvic organs
- It can help prevent leaking urine when you sneeze or cough
- Conditioned muscles will make birth easier, and your perineum will more likely be intact (fewer tears and episiotomies)
- Sexual enjoyment is enhanced for both partners