

KEGEL EXERCISES

Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles that surround the vagina, urethra, and anus. Doing these exercises can help speed up your physical recovery after the birth of your baby. During pregnancy and after giving birth, many women experience leakage of urine, especially with coughing, sneezing or straining. Kegel exercises can also reduce this urinary incontinence during pregnancy and later on in life. Kegel exercises are safe in pregnancy.

How to do "kegels"

The easiest way to understand which muscles of the pelvic floor to contract is to start and then stop the flow of urine. Once you have identified which muscles to use, however, it is best not to do these exercises during urination.

- Be sure to keep your back, abdominal, and thigh muscles relaxed so you can concentrate on the pelvic floor muscles
- Concentrate on pulling the muscles up and in
- Hold the contraction of the muscles to the count of three, and then relax to the count of three. Do this ten times
- Work up to holding the contraction to the count of 10
- Do this 10-20 times in a row, at least five times a day

When you are familiar with the location of these muscles, you can perform these exercises anywhere: while sitting in your car at a stop light, watching television, doing the dishes or feeding your baby. Sometimes engaging in a particular activity can be a reminder for you to perform the exercises. Consider "kegeling" every time you talk on the phone, wait in a line, or watch advertisements on television. Be consistent. Perform kegels every day to see the best results.

The "elevator exercise"

An excellent way to perform this exercise is to pretend that you are on an elevator, going up. Start by tightening the superficial muscles of the pelvic floor. This is the 2nd floor. Then relax and imagine that you are going back down to the 1st floor. Go up the elevator again. As you reach the 2nd floor, tighten your pelvic floor muscles as before. Take it even further to the 3rd floor and tighten the muscles tighter. Then go back to the 2nd floor and then the 1st floor (relaxed). Continue this process up to the 6th floor, contracting your pelvic floor muscles tighter and tighter as you "go higher" in the elevator. When you reach the 6th floor, pretend to step off the elevator in your mind, walk around for a while, continuing to contract the muscles, then get back on, and go to the 5th, the 4th, etc.

How long until I see results?

Be patient. Results are not immediate. It can take six to twelve weeks of 100 to 200 kegels per day before you notice marked improvement. Continuing kegels over the course of your life can help to keep your pelvic floor muscles toned.