

Pelvic floor muscles in men support the abdominal contents, are active during breathing, maintain bladder and bowel control, increase local blood supply and are active during sex. Weak pelvic floor muscles can compromise their normal function leading to possible control issues of passing wind, stool and urine control as well as erectile dysfunction. On the contrary spasm of the pelvic floor muscles can lead to chronic pelvic pain, pain during or after intercourse, and premature ejaculation.

Kegel exercises are exercises that can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, and so improve urinary and faecal (stool) incontinence, leakage or dribble, and erectile function.

CAUSES OF PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE WEAKNESS

Pelvic floor muscle weakness can be caused by:

- surgery for bladder or bowel problems;
- prostate surgery;
- chronic constipation;
- being overweight;
- heavy lifting;
- coughing that goes on for a long time (such as smoker's cough, bronchitis or asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease);
- being physically inactive;
- injury or trauma to the pelvic region; and
- chronic lower back pain/problems.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Performing these exercises regularly and correctly (taught and guided by your physical therapist) is proven to:

- improve urinary and faecal (bowel) incontinence
- improve stress incontinence
- prevent post urination dribble
- improve erectile dysfunction
- sustain and control ejaculation.

HOW TO DO STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

1 Find the right muscles

- To identify pelvic floor muscles, stop urination in midstream. These are pelvic floor muscles.
- If you stand naked in front of a mirror, contracting your pelvic floor muscle

MEN'S PELVIC HEALTH

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

KEGELS FOR MEN



will lift the base of your penis moving it closer to your stomach.

- Squeeze the ring of muscle around the anus as if you are trying to stop passing wind. Now relax this muscle. Squeeze and let go a couple of times until you are sure you have found the right muscles. Try not to clench your buttocks, keep them relaxed. These are your posterior pelvic floor muscles.

2 Perfect the technique. Once identified, with an empty bladder, lie on your back with your knees bent and apart. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles, hold the contraction for three seconds, and then relax for three seconds. Try it a few times in a row but don't overdo it.

3 Make the exercise harder (progression). Try doing these exercises while sitting on a flat surface or wobbly surface, standing, and walking.

4 Maintain focus. For best results, focus on tightening only your pelvic floor muscles. Be careful not to flex the muscles in your abdomen, thighs or buttocks. Avoid holding your breath. Instead, breathe freely during the exercises. Repeat three times a day. Aim for at least 3 sets of 10 repetitions a day. Increase the contraction time up to 8–10 seconds. Here you are building muscle endurance.

5 Add quick contractions. After doing the slow contractions described above, do 5–10 very quick, short, sharp contractions (squeezes). The ability of the muscle to respond fast can help prevent an accident by quickly stopping urine leaks. Remember to keep your abdominal (stomach), back, and leg muscles relaxed during these exercises. Feel only the muscles between your legs (pelvic muscles),

and around the anus, contracting. Try not to hold your breath while doing these exercises.

Thinking through the phrases below might help you to contract the right muscles.

- 'Stop the flow'
- 'Shorten the penis'
- 'Lift the scrotum' (especially helpful if sitting)
- 'Prevent passing wind'
- 'Tighten around the anus'.

RELAXATION EXERCISES FOR THE PELVIC FLOOR

As mentioned, spasm in these muscles can affect sexual function and cause pain. Apart from myofascial release and trigger point therapy you can relax and ease the tension using breathing and visualisation techniques.

When you breath in (inhale) deeply, your diaphragm – which is domed upwards – flattens down into your abdomen. This causes your lungs and ribcage to expand, which requires your abdominal contents to shift downwards to allow space for the diaphragm. This can only be achieved by the pelvic floor muscles relaxing and stretching and so expanding the space within the pelvic cavity. When performing deep diaphragmatic breathing exercises you are indirectly relaxing your pelvic floor. You can perform this while sitting or lying down. Keep your shoulders relaxed, place your hands on your stomach, feeling a slight elevation of your stomach as your diaphragm lowers into your abdomen with the inhalation.

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