

“KEGELS”

Dr. Arnold Kegel developed the Kegel exercises for women who had difficulty controlling urination because of a weak pubococcygeus (PC) muscle. This circular muscle stretches from the pubic bone, around the pelvic cavity, and then to the tailbone in the back. It supports the uterus and bladder and encircles all three of the pelvic openings (the urethra, vagina, and rectum), enabling them to open and close. It is important for women to practice Kegels throughout their lifetime for the following reasons:

1. **Preparation for childbirth.** Because the PC muscle encircles the vagina, it must stretch immensely to allow the baby to be born. By becoming aware of the PC muscle and learning to consciously relax and contract it, women are better able to deliberately relax it during labor. This exercise also tones and conditions the muscle, making it more elastic. A relaxed, stretchy PC muscle helps prevent tears and episiotomies during birth.
2. **Re-strengthening and toning after birth.** The stress of childbirth can cause the PC muscle to weaken, allowing the uterus and/or bladder to prolapse or fall into the vagina. A weakened PC muscle can also result in involuntary or frequent urination. Practicing Kegels will help restore the muscle tone needed to support the pelvic organs and preserve control of urination. Kegels should be started immediately after birth unless a mediolateral episiotomy (off to the one side instead of straight) is cut. In this case, waiting 7-10 days before starting Kegels is recommended.
3. **Increased sexual pleasure.** Kegel exercises increase the circulation and sensitivity of the genitals as well as enhance muscle tone in the vagina. It is pleasurable for both partners if Kegels are practiced during intercourse. Women may achieve orgasm by rhythmically contracting and releasing the PC and vaginal muscles during intercourse.

HOW TO DO KEGELS

Locate the PC muscle. One way is to try to stop and start the flow of urine (without moving your legs) while urinating. The muscle used to start and stop urine is the pubococcygeus. If you can't locate the PC muscle the first time, try again later...it is there. Once you locate the PC muscle, there are several ways to practice the exercise:

- Tighten or contract the muscle, hold it tight for 3 seconds, then relax and repeat.
- Contract and relax the PC muscle as rapidly as possible.
- Gradually contract the pelvic floor upwards while inhaling. Imagine the PC muscle as an elevator rising one level at a time as you contract upward. When it is as tight as you can make it, slowly exhale and relax the PC muscle one level at a time until it is completely loose again.
- Pull up the entire pelvic floor as though you are trying to suck in water, and then bear down as though you were pushing all of the water out. This exercise also used some abdominal muscles.

Kegels can be done inconspicuously, anywhere at anytime. To make this exercise part of your routine, it may be helpful to practice at a regular time each day. Some women practice while driving home from work or while watching TV or cooking.

It is recommended that you do 10 of each exercise 5 times a day. Increase the number of Kegels by five each week. You may have to start more slowly at first if the PC muscle is weak from lack of exercise. It is possible to make yourself sore if you overdo it. Keep at it and soon you will notice improvement.