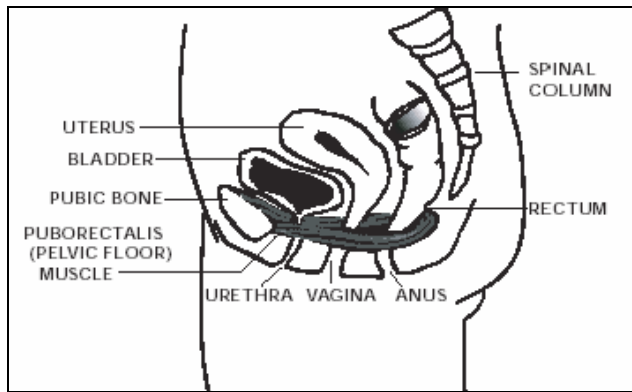


Pelvic Muscle Exercises (Kegels)

What are Pelvic Muscle Exercises? The pelvic floor muscle, like other muscles, can become weak. Pelvic floor muscle or **Kegel** exercises help to strengthen weak muscles around the bladder. Doing these simple exercises several times daily will strengthen your pelvic floor muscles and will help decrease or prevent urine leakage.

Where are the Pelvic Floor Muscles? The pelvic floor muscles surround the urethra and rectum and, in women, also the vagina. (See Figure below.) When you contract the pelvic floor muscles, these openings are squeezed shut. This is the action that helps prevent unwanted urine leakage.

Pelvic floor muscles *are under your control*. You can tighten (contract) them and relax them. To feel the pelvic muscles, imagine that you are trying to hold back gas after eating a rich meal. These are the muscles you want to exercise.



Adapted, in part, with permission, from: American Geriatrics Society Patient Education Resources. Behavioral Treatments for Controlling Urge and Stress Urinary Incontinence. (See www.healthinaging.org). Jane Frahm, BS, PT Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan, Detroit Michigan.

(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)

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What is the Method for Doing these Exercises?

With correct contractions, *men and women* feel their rectum tighten. Men will notice the penis moves slightly and women may note that they feel activity in the vagina. Both men and women will feel a lifting action with contractions.

1. Practice puckering your anus (not buttocks), as if you are trying to hold back urine, gas, or a bowel movement. Feel the pelvic floor muscles work for about 3, 5, or 10 seconds, then relax for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat this sequence five times if you can and do it at least five times a day.

TIP: Think of an elevator as it slowly goes up, hold the contraction for 3, 5, or 10 seconds at the highest level, and then relax.

2. Do not use your stomach, legs or buttock muscles. You can place your hands on your abdomen while you are practicing your exercises. If you feel your abdomen move, you are also using your stomach muscles. Relax them and use only your pelvic floor muscles.

3. You can also contract your pelvic floor muscles throughout the day with those activities *that make you leak urine*. Think of actions that make you leak, such as clearing your throat, blowing your nose, laughing, sneezing, coughing, getting up from a chair, and so forth. Strongly contract your pelvic floor muscles while you are doing these activities to prevent the leak.

Do not get discouraged. It usually takes at least 4 to 6 weeks of doing your exercises several times daily before you will begin to have less urine leakage. After 3 months, you will notice an even bigger change.

If you forget to do your exercises for several days, begin your program again. Do not try to make up for missed days by doing more exercises each day, or you may have sore muscles.

(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)