

STRENGTHENING YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

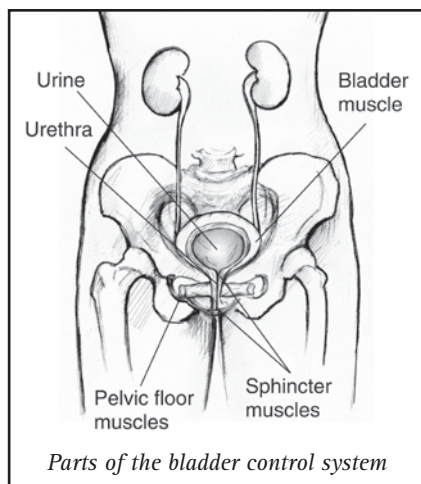
Bladder Control

BLADDER HEALTH

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AMERICAN UROLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Millions suffer with urinary incontinence, often feeling as if their bladders control their lives. But bladder control depends on muscles working together—and you can take a simple step to control your bladder.



Parts of the bladder control system

Image courtesy of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health

When the bladder is filling, the bladder muscle should be relaxed and the muscles around the urethra (the tube that urine passes through), called the pelvic floor muscles, should be tight. Exercises that strengthen the pelvic floor muscles can help prevent leakage and calm bladder urges. These are commonly called “Kegel” or pelvic floor muscle exercises, named after the doctor who developed them. Pelvic exercises help keep your pelvic floor muscles toned, and may reduce your risk of problems with accidental leaking of urine or frequent urges to urinate.

What Should Kegel Exercises Feel Like?

Imagine you are in a crowded room and feel as if you are going to pass gas or “wind.” Most of us will try to squeeze the muscles of our anus to prevent the passing of gas. The muscles you squeeze are the pelvic floor muscles. Women will feel a slight pulling in the rectum and vagina. Men will feel a pulling of the anus and movement of the penis.

Strengthen Your Pelvic Floor Muscles.

Once you locate your pelvic floor muscles you are ready to begin. You can gain control over these muscles so that they will be strong. You can use them to help prevent urine leakage or to decrease the feeling or urge to urinate. The exercise involves squeezing then relaxing your pelvic floor muscles. Squeeze the muscles for five seconds (As your pelvic muscles get stronger, you can lengthen this squeeze to 10 seconds) and then relax the muscles for five seconds. Be sure to take the time to relax between squeezes so that your muscles can rest before squeezing again. Each squeeze and relax counts as one repetition.

You should do these exercises in three different positions: 10 repetitions lying down, 10 sitting, and 10 standing. Do one set of 30 repetitions in the morning when you get up and one set of 30 at night. The exact time of day does not matter. What is important is that you develop the habit of doing the exercises every day.

In the beginning, you will need to set aside time to concentrate while you do the exercises. Each time should be associated with a cue that will remind you to practice. For example, you may want to exercise just after you get up in the morning and before you fall asleep at night. You can use any activity that you perform daily as a reminder.

Control Your Pelvic Floor Muscles.

It may take some practice to learn to control your pelvic floor muscles. When doing the exercises, relax your body as much as possible and concentrate on your pelvic floor muscles. To avoid using your stomach muscles, rest your hand lightly on your belly as you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. Be sure that you do not feel

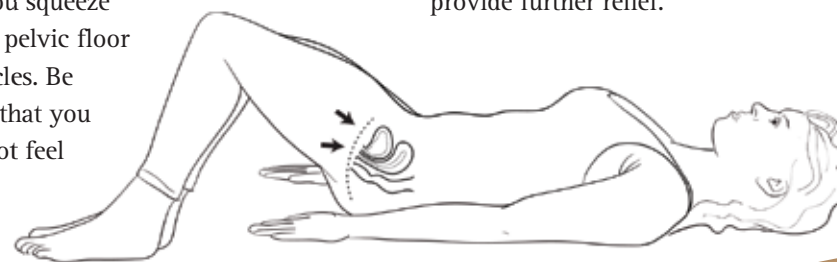
any movement of your stomach. Do not hold your breath.

To test whether you are tightening the wrong muscles, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles while sitting in front of a mirror. If you see that your body is moving up and down slightly, you are also using your buttocks or thigh muscles. When done properly, no one should be able to tell that you are squeezing your pelvic floor muscles—except for you.

How Often Should I Exercise?

Do your exercises often enough to make them a habit – but at a minimum of 30 repetitions twice daily. Pelvic floor muscle support usually improves within six weeks after starting the exercises.

Strengthening your pelvic floor is one step you can take to control your bladder. And, while unwanted leaking of urine and frequent sudden urges to urinate may be embarrassing to talk about, your health care provider can offer other treatment options that may provide further relief.



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Where Can You Go for More Information about Bladder Health Issues?

For more information about strengthening your pelvic floor muscles, please visit the AUA Foundation's website, www.UrologyHealth.org or call the Urology Health Line at 1-800-828-7866 for assistance in English and Spanish.

ABOUT THE AUA FOUNDATION:

The AUA Foundation is the world's leading non-profit urologic health foundation and the Official Foundation of the American Urological Association. Our mission is to promote health, provide hope and promise a future free from urologic diseases, including cancer.

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Support for this
brochure was provided
by an educational
grant from Pfizer.



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