

Pelvic Floor Muscle Strength

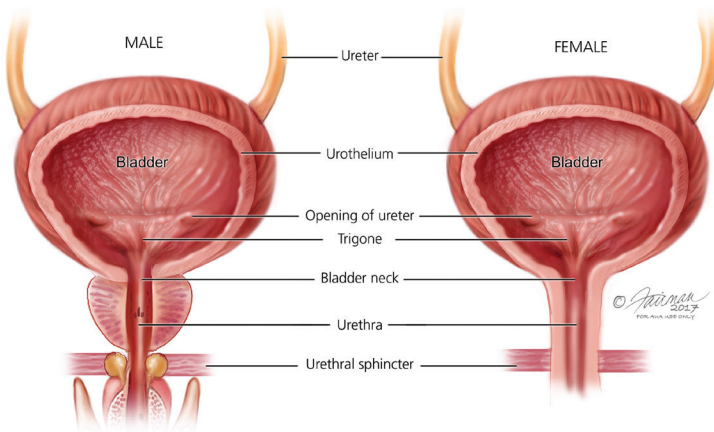
What You Should Know



Millions suffer from urinary incontinence (urine leakage). Often people feel as if their bladders control their lives. But this does not have to be your story. You can take steps to help control your bladder.

What is Bladder Control?

Bladder control depends on muscles working together. The bladder muscle should be relaxed when the bladder is filling and the pelvic floor muscles should be tight. The pelvic floor muscles surround the urethra (the tube that urine passes through). When they tighten they help prevent leakage. Strong pelvic floor muscles can help prevent leakage and calm the urge to pass urine.



There are some exercises that can strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. They are called “Kegel” or pelvic floor muscle exercises. Kegel exercises will help keep your pelvic floor muscles firm, reducing problems with leakage.

What Should Kegel Exercises Feel Like?

Imagine you are in a crowded room and feel as if you must pass gas or “wind.” Most of us will squeeze the muscles of our rectum and anus to prevent passing gas. The muscles you squeeze are the pelvic floor muscles. When women perform Kegel exercises correctly, they will feel a slight pulling in the rectum and vagina—a similar feeling to winking or puckering your lips. Men will feel a pulling of the anus and the penis will move. You can learn to control these muscles and make them stronger.

How Do You Strengthen Your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

To make your pelvic floor muscles stronger, alternate between squeezing and relaxing them. Follow the steps below to help.

1. Squeeze your muscles for one second and hold
2. Relax your muscles for two seconds
3. Each time you squeeze and relax, it counts as one set
4. Complete five sets

When you can do the exercises easily, increase to doing them 10 times per day. When that gets easy, try to squeeze and hold the muscles for three seconds and then relax the muscles for three seconds. As your pelvic muscles get stronger, you can progress to longer squeezes for about 10 seconds. Be sure to relax between squeezes so that your muscles can rest before squeezing again.

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

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At first you will need to set aside time to concentrate while you do the exercises. Find a cue or regular activity that will remind you to practice. For example, you may want to exercise just after you get up in the morning and right before you go to bed at night.

Control Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

It will take practice to learn how to control your pelvic floor muscles. When doing the exercises, first relax your body as much as possible and concentrate on your pelvic floor muscles. Focus on just squeezing your pelvic floor muscles. To avoid using your stomach muscles, rest your hand lightly on your belly when you squeeze. You shouldn't feel your belly move.

Exercise often enough to make it a habit. Once you have advanced to performing 30 sets two times a day, continue this routine indefinitely. Pelvic floor muscle support usually gets better about six weeks after starting the exercises.

How Your Health Care Provider Can Help

It is vital not to overdo these exercises. Too many of these exercises could strain your pelvic floor muscles which can lead to bad results. Working with a pelvic floor physical therapist may allow you to do these exercises the right way.

Strengthening your pelvic floor is one step you can take to control your bladder. But exercises may not be enough. You should tell your health care provider if you have urine urgency or if you are leaking urine. Do not be embarrassed. They can offer other treatment options that may provide further relief.

About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions** or go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

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