

Kegel Exercises for Women

What are Kegel exercises?

Kegel exercises strengthen and improve your control over a muscle called the pubococcygeus (or PC). The PC muscle is part of a sling of muscle stretching from your pubic bone in front to your tail bone in back. This muscle helps your urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder), vagina, and anus open and close.

The PC muscle also helps hold your bladder, uterus, and small intestine in place. If the muscle is weak, these organs can slip downward and cause problems, including:

- trouble passing urine
- trouble holding in urine when you laugh or cough (called stress incontinence)
- some types of pelvic pressure

Why do Kegel exercises?

Doing Kegels can help you:

- regain bladder control **and** restore muscle tone to the vagina after childbirth and as you age
- prevent urine from leaking, if you have stress or urge incontinence
- support the uterus and other pelvic organs, especially during pregnancy
- decrease uncomfortable spasm of the pelvis
- increase sexual pleasure

Kegels are different than most exercises because you can do them anywhere—driving your car, watching TV, sitting at your desk, doing dishes, or talking on the telephone.

Because the PC muscle is small and hidden, no one can tell that you are doing the exercises.

How do I find my PC muscle?

Sit on the toilet. Spread your legs apart and sit up straight. Try to stop and start the flow of urine. That's your PC muscle working. If you don't find it the first time, don't give up. Keep trying when you urinate.

There are two good ways to check on how you are doing. The first is by inserting one or two lubricated fingers into your vagina while practicing the exercise (this can be done comfortably in the bath). The other is by grasping your partner's penis with your PC muscle during sex. In both cases you should feel your vagina tighten and release.

The PC muscle is a muscle you have to think about to use. It won't tighten by itself. To prevent urine leakage, you must learn to tighten it **before** leakage occurs. So, if you sense a sneeze coming on (or any other action that would make you leak), tighten your PC muscle and hold it until the sneeze has come and gone.

How do I do Kegels?

You can do Kegels sitting, standing, or lying down, but your stomach and legs should stay relaxed. Only use your PC muscle, not the muscles in your stomach, buttocks, or back. It may be helpful to place your hand on your stomach so you can be sure it stays relaxed. Remember, the relaxing part of this exercise is

just as important as the tightening part. Be sure to breathe normally.

- **Slow Kegels:** Tighten your PC muscle. Hold it for a slow count of five. Relax it.
- **Quick Kegels:** Tighten and relax the PC muscle as quickly as you can.

Start by doing 20 of each exercise (one set) five times a day. You don't have to do them at the same time each day. Each week do five more of each exercise until you are doing 50 Kegels. Keep doing five sets a day. Sometimes the PC muscle will start to feel tired. Rest a while, then start again.

At first you may notice that the PC muscle doesn't want to stay tight during slow Kegels and that you can't do quick Kegels very fast. That's okay, but keep at it. In a few weeks you will probably be able to do them quite well.

You need to do these exercises regularly if you want results. You may not see any changes for about three months. While some people only need to do Kegels for a few months, others need to do these exercises for the rest of their lives.

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