

KEGEL EXERCISES

The pelvic floor muscles (pubococcygeus muscle) surround the vagina. These muscles are usually in good tone, but can get loose with childbirth, inactivity and sitting a lot, and age. The prevalence of urinary stress incontinence ranges between 40 and 50 per cent in many studies. Increasing the elasticity of this group of muscles can be obtained by doing Kegel exercises regularly (that is, every day).

Locating the Pelvic Floor:

The simplest way to locate the muscles of the pelvic floor is to stop passing urine in midstream by lifting and squeezing the muscles to stop the flow. Once you've identified the muscle, go on to empty the bladder completely. If you are unable to stop voiding midstream, you can identify your pelvic floor by touching the muscle. You should place the top of the index and middle fingers on the skin just behind your vagina. When the muscle contracts correctly, it will lift up away from the fingers. You can also identify your pelvic floor by inserting the tips of your index and middle fingers into your vagina. A correct muscle action will give a gripping and lifting feeling around the fingers. Alternatively, you can try gripping your partner with the pelvic floor muscles during intercourse.

The exercises:

Once the correct muscles have been identified, incorporate Kegel exercises into your daily activities, ones which don't require a lot of moving around – driving your car, watching TV, doing the dishes or while going to the bathroom.

Quick Kegel: Tighten and relax the pelvic floor muscles as rapidly as you can, five times, then relax and repeat.

The Super Kegel: Penny Simkin recommends this exercise as being the most effective, done 5 – 10 times per day and one which can easily be instituted as part of your daily routine especially if performed during each bathroom stop.

How to do it...

“Tighten the pelvic floor only as if you are trying to hold back the flow of urine. Hold it... hold it... if you feel it start to fade even if you are not letting go, RENEW it... renew it... again and again for 10 full seconds, then slowly let go.”

A sign that your pelvic floor is becoming fatigued is when you start to hold your breath or use other muscle groups such as your inner thighs, buttocks, or abdominal muscles. If you feel your pelvic floor muscle tone starting to diminish during the contraction, renew the tightening and visualize your muscle fibres as bringing in fresh energy to the muscles becoming fatigued. If you do these exercises regularly you will notice a rapid improvement in your pelvic floor tone.

These exercises should be done everyday during your pregnancy, then as soon as possible postpartum, and everyday of your life thereafter!