



# Kegel Exercises

*Improving bladder control*

**This handout explains how to do Kegel exercises to help strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.**

Pelvic floor muscle exercises are also called *Kegel* (kay-gull) exercises. They are named after Arnold Kegel, the doctor who developed them. These exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, which are called *pubococcygeous* muscles.

Your pelvic floor muscles allow you to control your urine stream. When you contract (tighten) and relax them, your *urethral sphincter* opens and closes. Your urethral sphincter is the opening urine flows through when it leaves your body. If your pelvic floor muscles are weak, urine can leak. Doing Kegel exercises regularly can make these muscles stronger. This will help improve your bladder control.

## How to Do Kegel Exercises

Begin by finding the muscles you want to exercise:

- As you begin to urinate, try to stop or slow the urine flow without tensing the muscles in your legs, buttocks, or abdomen. It is very important not to use these other muscles, because only the pelvic floor muscles help with bladder control.
- When you are able to slow or stop the stream of urine, you have found the right muscles. Feel the sensation of the muscles as they pull inward and upward.

### *Helpful Hint*

Squeeze your rectal area to tighten your anus, as if you are trying not to pass gas. You will be using the right muscles.

After you have found the right muscles, you are ready to do your Kegel exercises. Make time to do these exercises 2 times every day, once in the morning and once in the evening.

**UW Medicine**

---

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
MEDICAL CENTER

---

**Set 1: Quick Contractions (QC):**

Tighten and relax your sphincter muscles as quickly as you can.

**Set 2: Slow Contractions (SC):**

Tighten the sphincter muscles and hold for a count of 3, then relax completely. Repeat. As you get stronger, increase your hold until you can hold for a count of 10 each time you tighten the muscles.

When you are learning to do these exercises, check to make sure you are doing them correctly. Watch yourself in the mirror, or place 1 hand on your abdomen and 1 on your buttocks to make sure your belly, thigh, or buttock muscles are not moving. If they are moving, keep trying until you are using only the muscles of your pelvic floor.

Your bladder control should begin to improve after doing these exercises every day for 3 to 6 weeks. If you keep a record of urine leakage each day, you should begin to notice fewer marks in the bladder leakage column. Slowly increase how often you do the Kegel exercises. If you make the muscles too tired by doing the exercises too often, you may have more leakage.

Make these exercises a part of your daily routine. Whether you are doing them to improve or maintain bladder control, you must do them regularly throughout your life. Use common situations such as watching TV, reading, waiting at traffic lights, and waiting in line at the store as cues to do a few exercises while you wait.

**Habits to Help Improve Bladder Control**

- Use the toilet regularly. Make toilet facilities more convenient. This may mean a bedside commode or a bedpan placed in your bed.
- Wear clothes that are easy to remove when it is time to use the toilet.
- Train your bladder. Set a clock to schedule times to visit the toilet. Start with every hour, then every 1½ hours, then longer, until you have a schedule that works for you. Avoid going to the toilet often “just in case.”
- Stay on the toilet until you feel your bladder is empty. Take your time. If you feel there is still some urine in your bladder, move around or stand up if you were sitting, sit back down, and lean forward slightly over your knees.

- Empty your bladder before you start a trip of an hour or more. Do not try to wait until you get home, or until it is more convenient to use the toilet.
- Learn to “squeeze before you sneeze,” and before you cough, laugh, get out of a chair, or pick up something heavy.
- Get on a regular bowel routine. Constipation affects bladder control.
- Avoid foods that are known to affect the bladder, such as tomatoes, chocolate, and spicy foods. Also avoid beverages that contain alcohol or caffeine. These can irritate your bladder and increase incontinence (leakage).
- Watch your weight. Obesity makes bladder control more difficult. Ask your primary care provider about a sensible diet if you are overweight.
- If you smoke, stop. Smoking irritates your bladder. And, a smoker’s cough may cause bladder leakage.

## **Your Exercise Schedule**

On the next page are suggestions for a daily Kegel exercise schedule, with spaces for you to mark days and times. During Week 1, we suggest doing 5 quick contractions, 10 slow contractions to a count of 3, and then 5 quick contractions.

When you have completed 8 weeks of exercises, you may continue at the rate shown for Week 8, or you may increase repetitions if you want. The total number of contractions can also be divided up over the course of a day.

Here are some examples of what the abbreviations on the schedule mean:

- “5 QC, 10 3 sec SC, 5 QC” means:
  - 5 quick contractions
  - Then 10 3-second slow contractions
  - Then 5 quick contractions
- “3-second slow contractions” means holding the contraction for 3 seconds.
- “20 QC, 25 10 sec SC, 20 QC” means:
  - 20 quick contractions
  - Then 25 10-second contractions
  - Then 20 quick contractions

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

- UWMC Women's Health Care Center:**  
206-598-5500  
Box 354765  
4245 Roosevelt Way N.E.  
Seattle, WA 98195
- UWMC Family Medical Center:**  
206-598-4055  
Box 354770  
4245 Roosevelt Way N.E.  
Seattle, WA 98195

WEEK 1			
5 QC, 10 3-sec SC, 5 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 5			
20 QC, 10 3-sec SC, 5 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 2			
10 QC, 15 4-sec SC, 10 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 6			
5 QC, 10 3-sec SC, 5 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 3			
15 QC, 20 5-sec SC, 15 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 7			
40 QC, 10 3-sec SC, 5 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 4			
15 QC, 20 10-sec SC, 15 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

WEEK 8			
50 QC, 50 10-sec SC, 50 QC			
Date	Day	A.M.	P.M.
	Mon		
	Tue		
	Wed		
	Thu		
	Fri		
	Sat		
	Sun		

**UW Medicine**

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
MEDICAL CENTER

**Patient Care Services**

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195