

About Your Treatment

Kegel exercises

This handout explains how to do Kegel exercises for bladder control. It includes healthy habits to help improve bladder control, and a weekly record for keeping track of when you do your exercises.

What are Kegel exercises?

Kegel (*kay-gull*) exercises were developed by Dr. Arnold Kegel. They help strengthen the muscles on the floor of the pelvis (the *pubococcygeous* muscles).

You can contract and relax these muscles when you open and close your *urethral sphincters*. These are the muscles that control your urine flow.

When these muscles are weak, there is urine leakage. But, with regular exercise, you may be able to strengthen these muscles. This can help you regain your bladder control.

How to Do the Exercises

Begin by finding the muscles you want to exercise:

- As you start to urinate, try to stop or slow the urine flow without tensing the muscles of your legs, buttocks, or abdomen. It is important not to use these other muscles, because only the pelvic floor muscles help with bladder control
- When you can slow or stop the flow of urine, you have found the right muscles. Feel the muscles pull inward and upward as you do this.

Hint: Squeeze your rectal area to tighten your anus, as if you are trying not to pass gas. When you do this, you are using the right muscles.

Now that you have found the right muscles, you are ready to exercise regularly.

Your Exercise Schedule

Set aside 2 times each day for exercising – once in the morning, and once in the evening. You will do both quick contractions and slow contractions each time:



Set aside 2 times each day for doing your Kegel exercises – once in the morning and once in the evening.

- For **quick contractions** (QC), you will tighten and relax your sphincter muscles as quickly as you can.
- For **slow contractions** (SC), you will contract the sphincter muscles and hold for a count of 3, then fully relax before doing another contraction. You will slowly increase how long you hold the contraction, up to a count of 10.

The Weekly Exercise Record form on page 4 of this handout lists how many sets to do week by week. It also provides space for you to write down when you do your exercises.

Tips

- At first, check yourself often to make sure you are doing the exercise right:
 - Watch yourself in the mirror or place one hand on your abdomen and another hand on your buttocks. Make sure you are not moving your belly, thigh, or buttock muscles when you contract.
 - If you see or feel movement in these muscles, keep trying until you are moving **only** the muscles of the pelvic floor.
- Your bladder control should start to improve in 3 to 6 weeks. If you keep a record of your urine leaks each day, you should start to see fewer marks in the “bladder leaks” column.
- **Slowly** increase how often you do the exercises. If you get the muscles too tired, you may have more leaks.
- **Make pelvic muscles exercises a part of your daily routine.** Whether you are doing these exercises to improve or maintain bladder control, you must do them regularly for the rest of your life. Make it a habit to do a few exercises when you are doing daily activities such watching TV, reading, stopping at traffic lights, and waiting in the checkout line at the store.

Healthy Habits for Bladder Control

These 10 healthy habits will also help improve your bladder control:

1. **Use the toilet regularly.** Make this easy to do. It may mean having a bedside commode or placing a bedpan or urinal in the bed.
2. **Wear clothes that are easy to remove** when it is time to use the toilet.
3. **Train your bladder.** Use a clock to schedule times to use the toilet. Start with once an hour, then once every 90 minutes, and keep extending that time until you reach a schedule that is good for you. Avoid going to the toilet too often, “just in case.”

4. **Stay at the toilet until you feel your bladder is empty.** Do not rush. If you feel there is still some urine in your bladder, move around, stand up if you were sitting, then sit back down, lean forward slightly over your knees, and try to urinate again.
5. **Empty your bladder before leaving on any trip that will last 1 hour or longer.** Do not try to wait until you get home or until it is “more convenient.”
6. **Learn to “squeeze before you sneeze.”** This means to contract your pelvic muscles before you sneeze and before you cough, laugh, get out of a chair, or pick up something heavy. These are all activities that can cause urine leaks.
7. **Make sure you have regular bowel movements.** Constipation can make it harder to control your bladder.
8. **You may want to avoid foods that can affect the bladder.** Some of these are tomatoes, chocolate, spicy foods, and beverages, especially drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine. These can irritate the bladder and make urine leaks worse.
9. **Watch your weight.** Obesity makes bladder control harder. If you are overweight, ask your primary care provider about a diet that will work for you.
10. **If you smoke, stop.** Smoking irritates the bladder. And, a “smoker’s cough” can cause urine leaks.

Exercise Sets

The Weekly Exercise Record on page 4 uses numbers and letters for the instructions. Here are some sample exercise sets and what they mean:

- **5 QC, 10 3-sec SC, 5 QC =**
 - 5 quick contractions
 - Then 10 3-second slow contractions (holding the contraction for 3 seconds)
 - Then 5 quick contractions

This is the set you will do twice a day for Week 1.

- **20 QC, 25 10-sec SC, 20 QC =**
 - 20 quick contractions
 - Then 25 10-second contractions
 - Then 20 quick contractions

This is the set you will do twice a day for Week 5.

Ask your health care provider if you have any questions about these exercises.

Weekly Exercise Record

WEEK 1

5 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 3

15 QC, 20 5-sec SC, 15 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 5

20 QC, 25 10-sec SC, 20 QC

DATE	DAY	A.M.	P.M.
_____	Mon	_____	_____
_____	Tue	_____	_____
_____	Wed	_____	_____
_____	Thu	_____	_____
_____	Fri	_____	_____
_____	Sat	_____	_____
_____	Sun	_____	_____

WEEK 6

30 QC, 30 10-sec SC, 30 QC

DATE	DAY	A.M.	P.M.
_____	Mon	_____	_____
_____	Tue	_____	_____
_____	Wed	_____	_____
_____	Thu	_____	_____
_____	Fri	_____	_____
_____	Sat	_____	_____
_____	Sun	_____	_____

WEEK 7

40 QC, 40 10-sec SC, 40 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	_____	_____

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Men's Health Clinic:
206-598-6358

* After week 8, keep doing the exercises at the same rate as week 8 (50 QC, 50 10-sec SC, 50 QC). You can add more repetitions if you wish. And, the total number can be divided up over the course of an entire day.