

PELVIC HEALTH: FACTS AND EXERCISES

Your bladder, bowels and pelvic muscle are all related. Often when one system is not working correctly, it can affect the others.

The first thing you need to understand is your anatomy:

- **Urethra:** This is the tube connected to the bladder that allows urine to exit the body. Muscles and ligaments support the position of the urethra.
- **Bladder:** Urine is stored here.
- **Detrusor muscle:** The muscle responsible for bladder function. When you urinate, it contracts. It relaxes the rest of the time.
- **Pelvic muscles:** The group of muscles going from the pubic bone to the tailbone, like a hammock. These muscles are made up of both fast and slow twitch muscle fibers. The urethra, vagina and rectum go through these muscles. These muscles play a role in urination and bowel movements. They tighten when you have to urinate or move your bowels and you are not near a bathroom. Then they relax prior to urination or a bowel movement. During an orgasm, they tighten.
- **Vagina:** A flexible canal surrounded by this muscle group.

PELVIC MUSCLE EXERCISES OR KEGELS THE MOST DIFFICULT, YET EASY EXERCISE

The hard part: finding the correct group of muscles, while **not** contracting your stomach, thighs or butt muscles. The best way to identify the right muscles is to imagine stopping your stream of urine, holding in a tampon or holding back gas or a bowel movement. Another key point, relaxing is as important as squeezing.

For **leakage of urine or stool, overactive bladder, pelvic organ prolapse**, this is what to do: work both the fast twitch and slow twitch muscle fibers.

- The fast twitch fibers do exactly what it sounds like, work fast. We call them quick flicks or winks. You squeeze your pelvic muscle quickly for two (2) seconds and then relax for two (2) seconds. Do 10-15 in a row, three (3) times a day.
- The slow twitch fibers give your muscles tone and support the surrounding structures. So now you are trying to hold the muscle group tight for five (5) seconds, relaxing for 10 seconds. The goal is 40 contraction/relaxation sets per day.

PELVIC HEALTH: FACTS AND EXERCISES *(Continued)*

For **pelvic pain**, the goal is to relax the pelvic muscles. They are often in spasm. So, you want to do a reverse pelvic muscle exercise or kegel. The purpose is to focus on relaxation and minimal contraction.

- To practice this, you contract for 1-2 seconds, then relax for 30 seconds. Do relaxation breathing during muscle resting.

After finding the correct muscles, the next important part is doing the exercises. In our busy lives, it is hard to work one more thing into our schedules. Make it easy to incorporate them into everyday life. My favorite phrase is, "Every time you pee, think of me and squeeze 5 to 10 times." Doing this will give you a lifetime of better pelvic health!

DIET FOR IRRITABLE BLADDER

The foods listed below may cause bladder irritation, which can lead to urinary urgency, frequency and pain. Stop eating or drinking the items listed below. Once you begin to feel better, you can add them back, one at a time, to determine what is irritating your bladder.

All Alcoholic Beverages

Apples

Apple Juice

Cantaloupe

Carbonated Drinks

Chilies / Spicy Foods

Citrus Fruits (lemons, limes, oranges)

Coffee

Cranberries

Caffeine

NutraSweet

Other bladder irritant: Nicotine

Grapes

Guava

Lemon Juice

Peaches

Pineapple

Plums

Strawberries

Tea

Tomatoes

Vinegar

