The problem:

Many men have problems with erection, ejaculation, urination, and pelvic pain. Some of these problems can be more muscular and some more nerve-related. The pelvic floor muscles can be weak and slow to respond - and a sagging pelvic floor changes the arrangement of the internal organs (bladder, urethra, prostate and bowel). This can be caused by gravity (including sitting and driving), heavy lifting and straining, back injuries, neurological problems and surgery. The pelvic floor muscles can also be dysfunctional - contracting in spasms, rather than smoothly contracting and releasing. This can occur under conditions of stress (including inability to use the bathroom when needed) and during repeated "flight or flight" reactions to stress, causing recurrent pelvic pain, especially with an enlarged prostate.

The solution:

The purpose of these exercises is to condition the muscles of your pelvic floor. The muscles respond to commands from your nerves, so when you do these exercises, you condition the nerve supply as well. Finally, the improved nerve and muscle function improves the healthy circulation in the area, including an improved blood flow to the penis, and better clearance of venous congestion around the prostate. The pelvic floor has multiple layers of muscles running in different directions. When you stop the flow of urine, or stop from passing gas, you are tightening and strengthening these muscle layers. The muscles also need to relax and lengthen out, smoothly and fully. It takes practice! Many men are subconsciously "clenched" a lot of the time, causing spasm and shortening of the muscles. Relaxing and opening the pelvic floor, and lengthening those muscles, is just as important as being able to tighten and contract them. The muscles of the pelvic floor are related to the muscles in the rest of the body. To open and relax the pelvic floor, you can open and relax your mouth and face. With practice, you can learn to consciously strengthen, then release the muscles, while relaxing your face, hands, shoulders, and leg muscles. If you do these exercises properly, you will see start to results after ten days. After 3 months, you will feel confident in doing them, and you won't forget to do them several times every day.

How:

- Start with exercise 1, and as you improve, add the others one by one, until you are able to do all of them well.
- Do these exercises several times, every single day - for example, while watching television, taking a shower, waiting at a red light, standing in line, talking on the phone, etc. Do ten reps (repetitions) each time.
- Note: nobody can tell you are doing them - especially if you relax your face and hands at the same time.
- It can take time to re-train your muscles, so be persistent, and you will succeed! These muscles are accustomed to hard work, and have a rich nerve supply, and they respond very well to training.

1. "Stop-and-go" (for the front muscles): When urinating, stop and start the flow of urine, over and over. Relax your face while you do. Don't be discouraged if this is difficult at first. Sit down to pee, if it helps. When you are confident that you can fully stop the flow, you don't need to do them while urinating anymore; you can do them anywhere.

2. "Close up shop" (for the middle muscles): Pretend you're trying to not pass gas. Don't suddenly "clench," but just smoothly close up. Use your pelvic floor, not your gluteals! Relax your face and shoulders while you do it. When you master this exercise, you should also release the muscles around the urethra (the "pee" muscles) at the same time.

3. "Kangaroo" (for the internal back muscles): Sit solidly on a chair. Imagine that you have a big, heavy, strong kangaroo tail attached to your sacrum (the flat bone at the bottom of your spine). It is resting heavily on the ground. The muscles of the kangaroo tail fan out across your entire low back and upper glutes. Gently try to "lift" this heavy, strong tail up off of the ground, using your imaginary kangaroo-tail muscles. Relax your face and hands while doing it.

4. "Four-story elevator" (entire pelvic floor): Imagine your pelvic floor is on the ground floor of an imaginary elevator.

   - Slowly tighten the muscles in stages, to go to the 1st floor, 2nd floor, 3rd floor, and 4th floor, holding the muscles firm at each "story." (Give the imaginary passengers time to get on and off).
• Then slowly relax the muscles in stages, floor by floor, until you arrive back at the "ground floor."
• Last stop: the basement. Breathe deep into the pelvic floor, and let the muscles fully relax outward.
• Then gently raise them back to the ground floor. (Do this exercise a total of 4 times.)

Other safeguards for the pelvic floor:
• When you do heavy lifting (at work, with kids, or at the gym), tighten your pelvic floor muscles before you lift.
• Tighten the muscles gently when you're about to sneeze or cough.
• Don't strain when you move your bowels. If you usually do this, start drinking 1/2 cup of prune juice every night at bedtime. It contains the natural fruit sugar sorbitol, a softener. (Eating whole prunes is less effective.)
• Keep a low box in the bathroom, and rest your feet on it when you move your bowels, to open the pelvic floor.

About sexuality and your pelvic floor:
When men have prostate problems (with difficulty urinating or holding urine, often with pelvic pain), and when they've had prostate and other pelvic surgery, it can have a dramatic impact on sexual function. Even if a man is single, it causes distress. There are several things you can do that are a little more sexual in nature, than just the pelvic floor exercises are, to improve this.
• If you have sex with a partner, do it lying on your back, while you relax and release your pelvic floor muscles. It's very good for your circulation. Tell your partner you're practicing increasing the blood flow for a harder erection, but that you need to lie still for a few minutes during sex, in order to do it. Practice every time.
• Whether or not you have sex with a partner, massage the entire area at least once a week (not just the penis). Use a pure massage oil, like almond or coconut oil (from the health food store). Massage the muscles of the groin and deep between the legs, relaxing your face, abdomen, and pelvic floor muscles while you do so. (If this involves orgasm, it is even healthier for your nerves and circulation. Relax deeply, afterward.)
• Internal pelvic massage can be helpful to relax the surrounding muscles, "deactivate" trigger points (neuromuscular "knots"), and reduce congestion in the area, through the rectum. It is usually performed for prostate problems, but can be very useful after prostate surgery or radiation as well. If you've never had this done before, it can sound intimidating, but if done properly, it is not embarrassing or traumatic.

Resources:


Updated Feb 2012 by Leigh Saint-Louis, MD