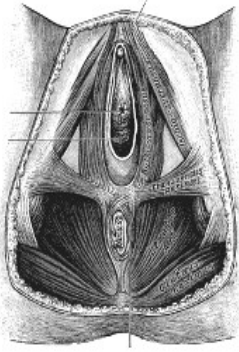


# Essential Exercises: Kegels for Women



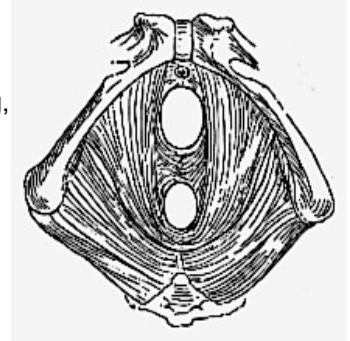
Seen from the outside  
Pubis on top, tailbone below

## What:

The purpose of Kegel exercises is to build up the muscles of your pelvic floor, which supports all of your internal organs. These muscles are affected by gravity, pregnancy and birth, heavy lifting, and back injuries. (If you have a neurological disease like MS or a spinal cord injury, these muscles may be permanently weakened, and you'll need to ask your doctor about modified exercises to maximize function.)

## Where:

When you tense up to avoid peeing or passing gas, you are contracting your pelvic floor muscles ("doing Kegels"). The pelvic floor has multiple layers of muscles running in different directions, so you use different muscles when you, for example, stop the flow of urine, or stop from passing gas, or have an orgasm. That's why we have different exercises - for these different muscles.



Seen from the inside  
Pubis on top, tailbone below

## How:

- Start with exercise 1, and as you improve, add the others one by one, until you are able to do all five well.
- Please do your Kegels on a daily basis - for example, while watching television, taking a shower, waiting at a red light, standing in line, talking on the phone, etc.
- It can take time to build up your muscles if they are weak, so please be patient and persistent, and you will succeed! These muscles are accustomed to hard work, and respond very well to exercise.
- How to tell if you're making progress: Exercise #1 ("On and off") lets you hear your progress. Alternatively, you can feel the muscles move, if you want, with a finger in your vagina. Also, by standing naked over a mirror with your legs open, you can see the muscles moving, when you Kegel. This is true for men as well as women. (Men do these exercises too!)

1. **"On-and-off"** (for the front muscles): When urinating, stop and start the flow of urine, over and over. Relax your face, hands, and legs while doing so. Do not be discouraged if this is difficult at first. You will see a noticeable improvement after the first ten days, if you do this each time you go to the bathroom. When you are confident that you can fully stop the flow, you don't need to do them while urinating anymore; you can (and should) do them anywhere.
2. **"Bum-stop"** (for the middle muscles): Pretend you are trying to stop from passing gas. Relax your face, hands, and legs while doing so. While contracting the muscles around the anus in this way, try to sense if you are able to also gently relax the muscles around the urethra (the "pee" muscles). It takes practice!
3. **"Kangaroo"** (for the back muscles): Sit solidly on a chair or box. Imagine that you have a big, heavy, strong kangaroo tail attached to your sacrum (the flat bone at the bottom of your spine). The muscles of the kangaroo tail fan out across your entire lower back and upper buttocks. Gently try to "lift" this heavy, strong tail up off of the ground using your imaginary kangaroo-tail muscles. Relax your face, hands, and legs while doing so.
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."
5. **"Pulsing"** (vaginal muscles): Perform 8 quick, sharp contractions in a row. Smile! This exercise mimics the motions of the vaginal muscles during orgasm, and can act as a temporary mood elevator. Smiling makes it work better.

## Other safeguards for your pelvic floor:

- If you do heavy lifting, contract your pelvic floor with a Kegel *before* lifting.
- Kegel when you're about to sneeze or cough.
- Don't strain when you move your bowels. If you often need to strain, drink 1/2 cup of prune juice every night at bedtime to soften the stool (contains the natural fruit sugar sorbitol), or take a docusate pill every other day.
- Keep a low box on hand, to rest your feet on when you move your bowels, to get closer to a squatting position.
- Don't "hover." If you worry about germs, carry baby wipes with you, to swipe the toilet seat before sitting.
- If you have sex with vaginal penetration, tighten your pelvic floor muscles as much as you can during activity.
- Orgasm - alone or with a partner - makes your pelvic muscles stronger, and vaginal penetration is *not* required.