

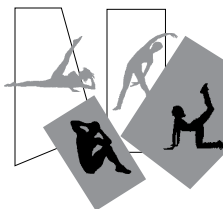
By way of background, the National Association for Continence (NAFC) is a 501 (c) 3 corporation whose mission is threefold: 1) to educate the public about the causes, diagnosis categories, treatment options, and management alternatives for incontinence, voiding dysfunction and related pelvic floor disorders; 2) to network with other organizations and agencies to elevate the visibility and priority given to these areas; and 3) to advocate on behalf of consumers show suffer from such symptoms as a result of disease or other illness, obstetrical, surgical or other trauma, or deterioration due to the aging process itself. NAFC is broadly funded by consumers, healthcare professionals and industry. It is the world's largest and most prolific consumer advocacy organization devoted exclusively to this field.

Always consult your doctor before trying anything recommended in this or any other publication that speaks to general health issues.



## Pelvic Muscle Exercises

Exercises Specifically for the Pelvic Floor



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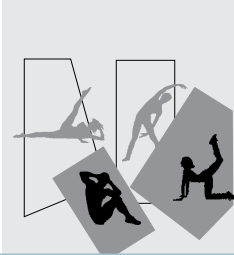
Promoting Quality Continence Care through

Consumer Education

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www.nafc.org

## Pelvic Muscle Exercises

Exercises Specifically for the Pelvic Floor



Pelvic muscle exercises are an important part of the behavioral treatment techniques that help increase bladder control and decrease bladder leakage. These techniques require your conscious effort and consistent participation.

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Pelvic muscle exercises, also called pelvic floor muscle or Kegel exercises – after Dr. Arnold Kegel, have been shown to improve mild to moderate urge and stress incontinence. When performed correctly, these exercises help strengthen the muscles that support your bladder. Through regular exercise you can build strength and endurance to help improve, regain, or maintain bladder and bowel control.

The muscles of the pelvic floor are located in the base of your pelvis between your pubic bone and tailbone. (See Diagram 1) These muscles have three main functions: (1) they help support the abdominal and pelvic contents from below, (2) they help control bowel and bladder function, and (3) they are involved in sexual response. Like other muscles in the body, if they get weak they are no longer efficient at doing their job.

### Locate and Recognize the Muscles

As you can see from Diagram 1, it can be difficult to find the pelvic floor muscles (PFM). They are the ones you use to hold back gas or stop a urine stream. Squeeze and lift the rectal area as if you were trying to hold back gas. For women, carry this movement forward

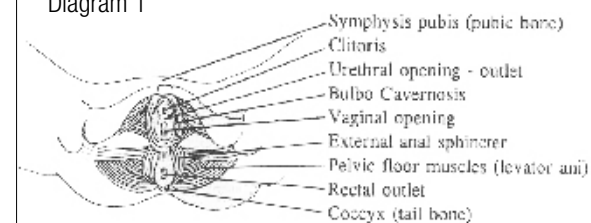
to the vaginal area as well. Try to avoid tightening the buttocks or abdomen.

Another technique used only to help you identify the PFM is to attempt to stop or slow the flow of urine when you go to the bathroom. Remember to relax and completely empty your bladder when you have finished this test. Do not do this start-and-stop test on a regular basis. It is not a helpful way to exercise the PFM and doing it too often can lead to infections.

This informational brochure, based on the proven pelvic muscle exercises developed by Dr. Arnold Kegel, is designed to describe a variety of techniques to help you exercise your PFM.

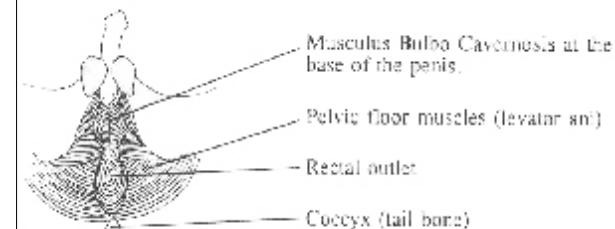
### Normal female pelvic floor

seen from below  
Diagram 1



### Normal male pelvic floor

seen from below



### Suggested Exercises

There are two types of exercises you should perform to lessen the symptoms of incontinence.

continued...

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The first exercise is a quick contraction. The muscles are quickly tightened, lifted up, and then released. This works the muscles that quickly shut off the flow of urine (like a faucet) to help prevent accidents. You should rest for 10 seconds in between contractions.

The second exercise works on the holding ability of the muscles, building a strong dam to hold back urine. The muscles are slowly tightened, lifted up, and held to a count of five. At first, you will probably notice that the muscles do not want to stay contracted or tightened very long, and you may only be able to hold the contraction for 1-2 seconds. You should progress slowly over a period of weeks to a goal of 10-second holds.

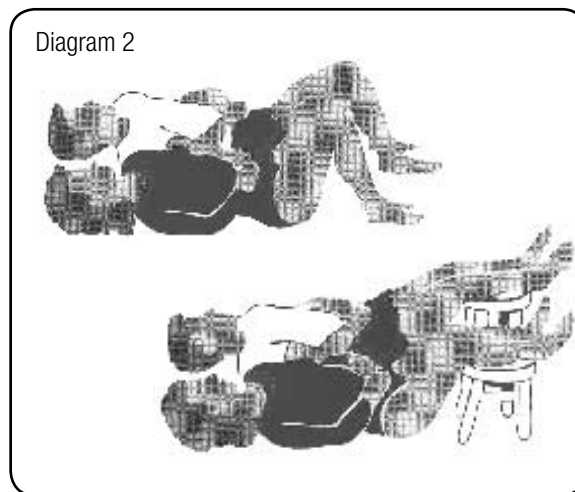
Now, you are ready to begin:

1. Remember, it is important to exercise only the muscles of your pelvic floor. Do not tense or contract the legs, buttocks, or belly.
2. You should contract the PFM as you blow out, or exhale, then continue to breathe normally as you do the exercises.
3. Remember to relax the body before and after the exercises.
4. In the beginning, it is best to do the exercises lying down so that there is little stress on the muscles. Bend your knees or elevate your legs on a pillow or stool so you are comfortable and your legs are relaxed. (See Diagram 2)

*Each of the exercises explained previously can be done with or without assistive devices. If you are using vaginal weights or wands, it is easier for some women to walk around while doing the contractions.*

### Suggested Exercise Schedule

Most people try to perform too many exercises and sacrifice quality. It is important to remember to stop and



rest when you are no longer performing each contraction properly. To improve muscle function you must challenge the muscles to work harder than normal by exercising them on a regular basis. Start with a set of 5 quick and 20 slow contractions, twice a day. You should progress at your own pace. The amount of time needed to show improvement varies from person to person. Increase the exercise periods as you notice improvement.

Remember, you must continue challenging your PFM for improvement. Your bladder and bowel control can begin to improve in three to four weeks. However, some people take three to six months to see improvement.

**Pelvic muscle exercises require a lifetime commitment.** Start your day with a set of pelvic muscle exercises. This is especially important if you have chosen to use vaginal weights or wands. It is easiest to use weights in the morning, as later in the day your muscles tend to become tired.

Helpful Hints:

- Always tighten the PFM before you lift, cough, or sneeze to help hold back the flow of urine.

Remember, learn to “squeeze before you sneeze”.

- Tighten the PFM before you clear your throat or blow your nose.
- Use pelvic muscle exercises to help suppress a strong urge to urinate until you can locate an appropriate place to empty your bladder.
- Pelvic muscle exercises should be incorporated into a regular exercise program.

### Assisted Pelvic Muscle Exercises

Various devices and techniques have been developed to help you locate, exercise, and rehabilitate the correct muscles. These include biofeedback training, electrical stimulation, and, for women, vaginal weights and wands.

Biofeedback can be done with a healthcare professional or with a home device. It helps locate the right muscles by sending a signal (feedback) when you perform the correct contraction. Pelvic muscle exercises performed with biofeedback equipment (see photo) have demonstrated to be highly effective because the machine helps isolate PFM activity and gives an immediate audio or visual indication of successful exercises.

These different training aids have also been known to add discipline to a Kegel program – helping people stick with a routine. Talk to your healthcare provider about these and other ways to assist your pelvic muscle-strengthening program.



### Advice From A Healthcare Provider

Because these muscles are out of sight, they are frequently out of mind and difficult to isolate. If you have any questions or difficulties, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. If you are considering Kegel exercises, it is wise to get proper instructions from a healthcare professional before you invest the time in the program.

In addition to the assistive techniques mentioned previously, bladder retraining, medications, and surgery are also used to treat incontinence. Sometimes a combination of all or some of these therapies is most helpful in managing and improving your bladder health.

### For Further Information

**Pelvic Muscle Exercises for Men** – The audio cassette tape and accompanying manual are most helpful for men experiencing urine leakage after prostate surgery. The manual provides thorough information about exercises and follows the verbal instructions with written descriptions and detailed drawings. (\$8.50 postpaid)

**Pelvic Muscle Exercises for Women** – This audio/visual kit is most helpful for women with mild to moderate stress and urge incontinence. The accompanying manual provides a thorough discussion of incontinence and pelvic muscle exercises, written instructions, and detailed drawings. The kit includes an audio CD with complete instruction and a 20-minute motivational video/DVD (\$20.00 postpaid).