



Cascade Women's Health  
PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

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## **KEGEL EXERCISES**

These exercises aim to improve bladder control and increase pelvic strength. They may also help orgasmic function and decrease involuntary embarrassing flatulence.

Before you begin, locate the pelvic floor muscles by experimenting while you are urinating. Pull up on the muscles that stop your urinary flow. Try to do this without tensing your legs, buttocks or abdomen. When the stream stops, or at least slows, you have located the correct muscles. If you have difficulty, try tightening the anus, as if trying to hold in gas. Pull inward and upward. Again, avoid tightening the abdomen or thighs.

When you have located the correct muscles, plan times that will be good for practicing the exercise. Before practice, empty your bladder. Begin by squeezing the muscles as tight as you can a few times, relaxing in between. Start with three sets of five squeezes. Aim to do three sets three to four times a day. It is helpful to place a hand on your low belly to be sure these muscles are not moving and that you continue to contract only the muscles of the pelvic floor.

In a few days you should move to longer exercises. Hold up the muscles for five seconds and then relax them over five seconds. Your goal is to increase to 10 second contractions and 10 second relaxations.

After 3-4 weeks of this schedule, bladder control will likely improve. Keeping a record of urine leakage each day may show you clearly that your bladder is leaking less often. Tightening the pelvic floor while jumping or sneezing will now be more effective.

Exercise your pelvic floor daily for a lifetime to maintain bladder control. Studies have clearly shown that these exercises are effective but need to be done regularly. You might have best success if you do a few exercises with routine activities, like washing dishes, watching the news, waiting in lines or at traffic lights. If you notice worsening bladder control, set up a schedule and follow it strictly for a while until there is noticeable improvement again.

Sometimes a physical therapist can assist you with targeting the right muscles and using vaginal "weight lifting" or biofeedback. We can help with referrals when appropriate. Also, if a regular schedule of Kegel exercises is not helping your bladder control, please discuss this with us. We may be able to make some additional recommendations.