

Kegel or Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises for Men

Kegel exercises are pelvic floor muscle exercises to help strengthen the sphincter that keeps your bladder from leaking urine. These muscles are weakened after prostate surgery such that it is not unusual for men to leak urine from their bladder until the strength returns. These exercises can speed this recovery and urine control.

What is the Pelvic Floor?

The pelvic floor muscles support the organs inside the abdomen and pelvis. A special function of the pelvic floor muscles around the outlet of the urethra (tube that urine passes through) is to contract and prevent urine leakage from the bladder during activities that increase bladder pressure like coughing, sneezing, bending over, and lifting.

Why should I exercise these muscles?

After prostate surgery, the pelvic floor muscles are weakened and take time to regain strength. During this time, men will experience leakage during various physical activities when before surgery they never had to worry about leaking. When the muscles are weak after surgery, you will need to make more of an effort to exercise and control these muscles so that you leak less and can get back to normal faster.

How do I know I am exercising the right muscles?

One way to isolate the muscles responsible for urine control so that you can make sure you exercise the right muscles is to pay attention the next time you are emptying your bladder and then try to stop the stream. The feeling you get when you squeeze off the urine stream is a contraction of the sphincter muscles of the pelvic floor that you want to exercise to improve control after surgery.

You don't want to do the exercises while you are urinating, but this stopping your stream on purpose to get a feel for how the exercises should feel is something you can do every so often, maybe one a week, so that you know you are doing your Kegel exercises right. If you are squeezing or contracting the right muscle, nobody should know that you are doing it. Your bottom or buttocks should **not** go up and down while sitting and your abdomen should **not** be contracting like a sit-up (both of these are using the wrong muscles).

You may see your penis move upwards slightly just as when you try to stop your urine flow, but otherwise you should be able to do the exercises while in the car, watching TV, or anywhere else without anyone knowing you are doing them because you will not be moving. The feeling is also similar to when you try to hold back from passing gas as the pelvic floor muscles for controlling urine are intimately associated with the anal sphincter as well.

How do I do these exercises?

After you have been able to correctly isolate the right muscles as above, you can start contracting these muscles regularly to improve your ability to control them when you are doing something that will make you leak and to increase their strength over time.

You should do Kegel exercises 3 to 5 times a day for a total of 30 repetitions every day. Try to do them at the same time every day so that it becomes habit like when you wake up, at 1 mealtime(s) and at bedtime.

This way, you won't have to try and remember to do the exercises just as you don't have trouble remembering to brush your teeth.

With each group of exercises, you want to squeeze the pelvic floor muscles for a count of up to 20 seconds. If the muscles start to relax after 5 to 10 seconds, that is ok. With repeated exercising the muscle strength will increase. **THE GOAL IS TO HOLD EACH REPETITION FOR 20 SECONDS AND RELAX FOR 20 SECONDS.** Perfect these 30 repetitions and you are well on your way to recovering urinary continence. **DO NOT DO MORE THAN THE RECOMMENDED 30 REPETITIONS.** More is NOT always better. Some people will try to do 100 or more Kegel exercises per day after surgery but then find that they leak more because they are tiring out the muscles by doing too much.

Where can I do these Kegel exercises?

When you start doing Kegel exercises, once the Foley catheter is removed after surgery, you may want to try them first while you are sitting on the toilet until you make sure you have found the right muscles. Until then, you may squeeze the wrong muscles and actually cause yourself to leak. After you have found the right muscles, you will not leak when you do the exercises and can do them anywhere, including inside and outside your home, standing, sitting, or laying down.

Practice makes perfect:

Once you have found out how to do Kegel exercises and how to squeeze your pelvic floor muscles, you should make an effort to do a Kegel or squeeze these muscles when you:

- Get up out of bed or out of a chair
- Lift something that could make you leak
- Get in and out of the car

The more you practice, the better you will get at controlling these muscles and preventing leakage during the activities that are most likely to make you leak. You will **not** notice improvement overnight as Kegel exercises can take 8-12 weeks before you see improvement. As long as you are getting a little better from week to week, do not get frustrated as you will probably not notice any difference from day to day.

Will I ever get urinary control back?

While the vast majority of men who have robotic prostatectomy will eventually regain continence or eventually leak so little that one safety pad is enough all day, some men will take longer than others to reach this point. In the minority of men, some degree of incontinence may persist permanently. When this occurs, it is more often in men with very severe cancers who require more aggressive surgery, men who have had radiation to the prostate previously, or those who have preexisting urine control problems or neurological conditions. For those men who have prolonged incontinence, referral to a physical therapist may be required. If you are concerned and would like to know what your likelihood of having urine control issues long term may be, please feel free to ask us.

Anything else to keep in mind?

Make sure that you are not holding your breath as you do Kegel exercises. If you are doing them right, they should feel relatively effortless or easy so that you do not need to hold your breath.