

## KEGEL EXERCISES & FINDING YOUR PELVIC MUSCLE

### WHAT IS THE PELVIC MUSCLE?

Your pelvic muscle provides support to your bladder, and rectum and, in women, the vagina and the uterus. If it weakens, it cannot support these organs and also their position changes. This change in position can cause problems with normal function. Keeping the muscle strong can prevent urine from leaking from your bladder.

### FINDING THE PELVIC MUSCLE

Without tensing the muscles of your leg, buttocks or abdomen, imagine that you are trying to control the passing of gas or pinching off a stool. Or imagine you are in an elevator full of people and you feel the urge to pass gas. What do you do? You tighten or pull in the ring of muscle around your rectum - your pelvic muscle. You should feel a lifting sensation in the area around the vagina or a pulling in of your rectum.

### EXERCISE REGIMEN

One exercise consists of both "tightening and relaxing" the muscle. It is equally important to control when your muscle tightens and relaxes. Therefore, you should relax for the same amount of time you tighten. Be sure to relax completely between each muscle tightening. There are 2 type of muscle contraction you will need to practice - Short quick contractions (2 seconds) and long (3-10 second) contractions. To do the quick muscle contractions, contract or tighten your pelvic muscle quickly and hard, and immediately relax it. For the long or sustained contractions tighten your pelvic muscle and hold for a count of 3 seconds, then relax the muscle completely for a count of 3 seconds. Over time you will increase the length of time you tighten the muscle to 10 seconds.

These exercises can be practiced anywhere and anytime. Individuals are instructed to do the pelvic muscle exercises (Kegels) three times daily. A minimum of 50-60 PME's per day is recommended. A gradual increase in number of contractions over a period of PME practice has been shown to increase muscle strength significantly and decrease urine loss. Exercises should be done in the following 3 positions. If you experience urine loss in one specific position only, increase the number of exercises for that position, or add additional exercises with focus on doing all the exercises in that position only.

- **Sitting.** Sit upright in a firm seat and straight-back chair, knees slightly apart, feet flat on the floor or legs stretched out in front and crossed at the ankles.
- **Standing.** Stand by a chair, knees slightly bent with feet shoulder width apart and toes slightly pointed outward. You can also lean on the kitchen counter with your hips flexed.
- **Lying Down.** Lie on your back, flat or with your head on a pillow, knees bent and feet slightly apart. It is helpful to support your knees with a pillow.

### INCORPORATING PELVIC EXERCISES INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE

In addition to doing your sets of exercises, you should start doing your exercises during activities of daily living. Do your exercises when: standing at the sink and brushing your teeth, washing dishes, putting on your make-up, sitting in the car at a stop light, sitting and having dinner, reading a book in bed, going for a walk, talking on the phone, etc.

To prevent urine loss, tighten your pelvic muscles just before activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, bending/lifting, sitting, standing, and going up/down stairs. For short activities like a cough, tighten your muscles until you finish, then relax. For prolonged activities, tighten during the most stressful moments or on and off during the entire activity.

### COMMON MISTAKES

- Concentrate and tighten only the pelvic floor muscle. DO NOT tighten leg muscles (thighs), buttocks or abdomen. If you feel your stomach move, then you are also using these muscles.
- DO NOT hold your breath. Breathe normally and/or count out loud.

### WHEN WILL I SEE A CHANGE?

After 4 to 6 weeks of daily exercise, you will begin to notice less urine leakage. Results may not occur until after 6-8 weeks of exercise, and optimal results usually take longer.