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Pelvic Floor Exercises *(Kegel Exercises)*

Pelvic Floor Exercises (PFE) help to improve or restore muscle tone to the levator ani muscles. These muscles form the pelvic floor and surround the openings of the urinary tract, vagina and rectum. Like any muscle in your body, the levator muscles respond to exercise and should be kept in good condition.

Pelvic Floor Exercises are recommended for women who want to:

1. Restore muscle tone after childbirth
2. Have more control over urination and to decrease urine leakage
3. Increase sexual awareness and become more aware of feelings in the genital area
4. Prevent or correct weak pelvic muscle support and avoid surgery for pelvic relaxation

These exercises are easy to do and fit into any woman's exercise plan. They can be done whenever you have a few minutes: watching TV, stopped at a red light, or sitting at your desk.

Identifying the levator muscles:

1. Your doctor may help you to identify the levator muscles by having you tighten your vaginal muscles around her fingers during a pelvic examination in the office.
2. You may try to identify the muscles yourself at home by one of two ways:
 - a. Sit in the toilet and spread your legs apart a little. Try to stop and start the flow of your urine without moving your legs. It may take some time for you to strengthen your muscles to control the urine flow. Don't be discouraged. Once you have identified the muscles, it is important not to continue to routinely interrupt your urine flow, as this may lead to difficulty with bladder emptying.
 - b. Insert 2 lubricated fingers into your vagina and squeeze. You should feel an increase in pressure on your fingers. It is important to try to pull up the entire pelvic floor as if you are trying to suck water into your vagina. You do not simply want to push down or out.

Performing Pelvic Floor Exercises:

Slow PFE: Tighten the levator muscles and hold for a slow count of five. Then relax the muscles for 5 seconds and repeat.

Quick PFE: Tighten and relax the levator muscles as rapidly as you can 5 times.

Initially repeat each exercise group 3 times and do them 3 times per day. Gradually work up to 50-100 times per day for each exercise. At first, you will probably notice that the muscles won't stay contracted for the slow PFE and that the quick PFE are not very fast or even. Keep trying. Your control will improve in a week or two. If the muscles start to feel tired, just stop. Rest for a few minutes and start again.

Like any exercise, your response will depend on your diligence in performing the exercises. It may take several weeks before you notice any improvement in your urinary control. You must continue the exercises indefinitely. If you stop doing the exercises, the muscles will lose their tone and you will notice a return of your previous symptoms.

If you have difficulty identifying the levator muscles, you may make an appointment in the office and we may be able to help you to identify the muscles and perform the exercises correctly. There are also several devices that can help you. One is vaginal cones, which are weights you wear in the vagina. In order to keep the cone from falling out, you must contract the levator muscles. You wear the cones at home for 15 minutes twice a day. Another option is physical therapy of the pelvic floor utilizing biofeedback or electrical stimulation. This is performed by a certified physical therapist at the A.C. Richardson for Pelvic Health at Piedmont Hospital, and will help you to identify and contract the levator muscles correctly. This option is particularly useful for women having difficulty identifying and contracting their muscles. Please let us know if you are interested in any of these additional options.

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