Give Yourself a Lift with Your Pelvic Core!

Pelvic floor muscles can have problems of weakness, spasm and imbalances, just like other muscles. This can affect continence, pain, and intimacy. Muscles of your pelvis and spine need to work together, for good support. They also need to be able to relax well, without losing your alignment.

Your entire trunk gives support to your spine, and is the foundation of your strength during activities. The muscles of the spine, abdominals and pelvic floor help to protect your back and prevent your pelvic organs from dropping. They also influence the forces on your hips, knees, and ankles during daily activities, running, walking and work-outs.

Dr. Kegel's research found that the pelvic floor muscles train better when they get a break. Your muscles need to release to allow for good blood flow bringing oxygen and nutrients.

Pause For Your Posture

Take a moment throughout the day to see what position your back is in. Neutral doesn't mean to flatten the back, since it should have a slight arch. Your spine should be in a steady position, without needing to throw your shoulders back. The trick is to learn how to maintain for activity and at rest.

Teach yourself to find your “Postural Home Base”. One way is to place your hands at the sides of your pelvis and curl your spine (pelvic tilt) which is like an abdominal crunch. Return to a position where you are resting on your sit bones. This is your home base! Follow this with gently extending into an arched position. Avoid forcing either direction and always return home.

Sensory Awareness and Variable Pelvic Floor Muscle Contractions

A great way to start any pelvic core exercises is to start with gentle, slow breathing. Start some practice while lying on your back, with a pillow under your knees. You can also try being on your side, with a pillow between your knees. When your body quiets, it is easier to feel your muscles.

Pull your pelvic floor muscles up and in and hold gently for 5 seconds then relax for 10 seconds. It can also help to place your hand at the vaginal entrance and feel if there is any inward movement. Then allow the muscles to lower and feel that change. Count out loud while you are holding the contraction to make sure that you are lightly breathing throughout the exercise and not straining. Later, you can add some moderate and stronger contractions for part of your exercise. If you exercise too hard, it can create or worsen muscle tightness and spasm, especially if there isn't enough attention to releasing the muscles.

Sitting exercises are great to try throughout the day. This is best in a chair with good support and your feet flat on the ground. Lift the pelvic floor as if the groin is rising up and in from the chair. Avoid allowing your back to move while you lift and then release the muscles. Focus on lowering the muscles back down to the chair, like a widening circle.
Another problem with traditional Kegel-style programs is the training encourages repetitions with squeezing hard as possible, perhaps only at the front of the vagina, or even just squeezing the legs together and holding for 10...20 or 60 seconds. This can lead some women to spasm when they are unable to release properly and may cause pain and/or bladder symptoms.

If you have difficulty with muscle tightness, tenderness, or trouble releasing, it is can be helpful to use heat locally at the groin area. Heat must be comfortable; toweling is helpful to avoid overheating. A hot water bottle or microwavable heat pack can fit the best, or a tub bath. This can be great at the end of the day, even as going to bed.

Start with slow breathing and focus on the release of your abdominals. After several slow breaths, try 5 seconds of very gentle pelvic floor contraction followed by 10 seconds of focused release and visualize lowering your bottom muscles without forcing. Make sure the abdominals release well too Repeat 5-10 repetitions, rest and repeat. Or simply focus on slow inhale with release of your pelvic floor and abdominals, gentle contractions with your exhale. Continue until you’ve been on heat for 10-20 min.

These Aren’t Your Grandma’s Old Kegel Exercises!

Many women have been taught to concentrate on isolating the pelvic floor muscles as hard as possible, without activating the abdominals. More recent research has shown certain abdominal and hip muscles help stimulate the pelvic floor to be more powerful. You should feel your lower abdominals gently joining in. Practice slow breathing, add gentle abdominal contractions and add pelvic floor. Gentle contractions are with exhale, while release is with inhale. Also practice with pelvic floor first.

Think about how you work and train other muscles in the body! Start with 5 warm-ups at 20-25% intensity, then 5 at 50%, etc. Avoid exercising with maximum efforts since this can cause strain. Consider "target practice" by trying the "elevator" exercises, or raising and lowering your muscles or like lifting as if you are following musical notes of a simple song. Gradually increase your total exercise, perhaps 10-15 min, 1-3 times daily.

Remember to activate the muscles before you are about to get up from a chair, leave your car, lift, bend, carry your child or groceries, garden, use weights or equipment.

- Try to be on your "sit bones" instead of your tailbone. Place your heels together with toes slightly outward and knees gently open. This can help you feel the muscles working.

- Try doing a few active contractions throughout the day, such as when you wash your hands, are waiting in a line or at a stoplight, or see water.

- Breathe slowly with a strong bladder urge and avoid rushing with long strides.

- Do not exercise by interrupting stream. That is just a way to train how to find muscles. Try 3-5 repetitions after finishing at the toilet, before rising, or while washing your hands.

Finally, it is not good for your shoulders and upper chest activate and tense before your lower abdominal, pelvic floor, and spine muscles. This creates a "bellows effect" with forces higher in the body pushing downward, before the lower muscles activate. For this reason, symptoms can be aggravated for people with incontinence, prolapsed organs and even pain. It can take more effort to improve problems, than to prevent them.

2015 Copyright Pat Salin Huston, MSPT  www.PassagesPT.com