



TEXAS UROLOGY

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE EXERCISE PROGRAM

The ability to control your urine depends largely on the ability to control your pelvic floor muscles. If you strengthen these muscles, you should soon gain control of your bladder. In a nutshell, a pelvic floor muscle exercise program follows the 3 "F"s":

- Feel it working
- Find its limit
- Force this limit higher

FEEL IT WORKING

Before you can take action to build up the strength of your pelvic floor muscles, you first have to know if they are working and, if so, how strong they are.

Sit on the toilet with the knees wide apart. Start the flow of urine, then stop it. It should "stop dead", not just slow to a trickle. Can you feel movement? Pull up as though you are about to pass gas. Squeeze up to stop the gas from escaping. Another trick is to imagine a pin is being brought closer and closer to your anus. Try to pull this opening away from the pin as it gets closer and closer. Feel what happens when you cough – feel the pressure down and the bulging outward. Gently bear down as though moving your bowels and feel the downward movement; this is exactly the opposite feeling to doing a pelvic floor contraction.

Now immediately squeeze and pull up – the feeling should be upward and inward. If you still cannot feel a contraction, try placing the index finger of your hand onto the tip of your tailbone at the back. The other index finger on your pubic bone at the front; close your eyes and imagine trying to pull these two points together. Do not hold your breath as this allows you to push down with your diaphragm. Continue to breathe rhythmically in and out as you try to contract your pelvic floor muscles.

FIND ITS LIMITS

In any muscles strengthening program, the aim is to gradually increase the load of work that the muscles are expected to do. The initial load depends on the initial strength. Having felt the contraction, how many times can you repeat this? You should hold for two seconds, then relax for four seconds.

This resting time is extremely important as muscles tire easily. Weak muscles must be given special consideration and time to recover after each contraction. Don't be put off if you can only contract once or twice. This is very often the case and you will be surprised at just how quickly this number will increase. Within your exercise program this initial number of contractions becomes "your number". Now that your initial assessment is complete, you are ready to begin your own strengthening program. If you have been completely unable to feel anything that vaguely resembles a pelvic floor muscle contraction you will probably need to seek the help of a physical therapist with special interest and training in this type of therapy.

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FORCE THIS LIMIT HIGHER

Do not use the urine “stop and start” mechanism as an exercise as it might prove dangerous. It should be used as a test, once a day, preferably the second time you go to the toilet. When doing the contractions in the sanding position, stand with feet wide apart and your toes turned in so that any feeling between your legs is bound to be from proper pelvic floor muscle contractions.

RED SPOT SPECIALS

Every time you think of it during the day, you should do your number of contractions. It is really easy to remember. Buy a packet of small colored self-adhesive spots (bright red or yellow) and place them strategically throughout the house and at work and even in the car. Every time you notice a spot, do “your number” of contractions. When you can achieve your number easily, do another assessment with your fingers and increase the contractions. “Your number” might increase by 1 or 2, or it might increase by 10. There is no real way of knowing unless you use your own fingers.

If you don’t assess, then you can’t progress, it’s that simple. Can you “hold” for the full 2 seconds? A cough or sneeze can last longer than you think. If your muscle contraction is just a “flick” and has no hold at all, don’t worry about it at the beginning of your exercise program. Wait until you have a definite muscle contraction which is improving in strength – that is, until “your number” has been increased at least once (e.g. from 5 to 8 or from 2 to 6), then begin trying to hold for the count of 2. “Holding” also gives the pelvic floor muscles a better chance of controlling bladder contractions that cause urgency, the incredibly strong desire to urinate that has you worrying if you will “make it” to the toilet in time. The bladder muscle, or detrusor muscle, tends to be much stronger than the pelvic floor muscles.

One thing to remember during your pelvic floor exercise program is that these muscles are under your voluntary control. Just like the muscles in your legs and arms, these muscles can get very tired. Those poor muscles of your pelvic floor deserve just as much tender loving care during their retraining. Please remember to be gentle and don’t push them too quickly. You will take two steps forward and one back if you do too much.

SUMMARY

Muscle Strengthening Plan

Feel it work

Find its limits

Force this limit higher

- If you don’t assess then you can’t progress
- Do your “red spot specials”

WARNINGS

- Stop your urine flow only once a day
- Overdoing your exercises can cause muscle fatigue and temporary loss of control – don’t overdo it
- Whenever you are run down, so is your pelvic floor – don’t expect miracles
- Repeated coughing or sneezing (e.g., flu or hay fever) can set your program back dramatically – don’t be discouraged.

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