

PELVIC FLOOR RELAXATION

Kegel exercises have been used in the past as a strengthening program for treatment of urinary incontinence. By decreasing the intensity of the contraction and by focusing on breathing, these exercises can also be used as a relaxation technique. Some people clench their pelvic floor during the day. A stressful situation, heavy concentration or pain may cause a person to inadvertently contract these muscles.

To relax your pelvic floor you must be certain that you have isolated the muscles. Get in a comfortable position such as lying on your back with a pillow under your knees. Turn off the TV and lock the kids out of the room! Begin with a few deep breaths focusing on inhaling through your nose while you exhale through pursed lips. Feel your belly gently rise and fall.

After you have relaxed like this for a minute or so, try to GENTLY contract your pelvic floor. A good visualization is that you are trying to pick up a marble with your vaginal muscles. Once you can feel the muscles contract, GENTLY relax your muscles. Imagine trying to put the marble back down slowly and deliberately. The relaxation portion of this exercise is critical. It is possible to tighten the muscles without fully letting it relax. This leads to pain.

Try doing a few contractions as mentioned above and then progress on to a longer hold. Try to maintain the contraction for 3-5 seconds. Don't bother counting the total number of repetitions. It is better to focus on overall time spent exercising. Set a goal of 2-4 minutes of exercising 2-3 times/day. Remember to continue breathing as you are exercising!

VARIATIONS:

1. While on your back with your knees flexed, try rocking your pelvis forward to increase the arch in your back. Now try tensing and relaxing the pelvic floor. After a few repetitions, try rocking your pelvis backwards to decrease the arch. Now try tensing and relaxing your pelvic floor. Do you feel a difference? Is one position more comfortable than the other?
2. While on your back with your knees supported on a pillow, try coordinating the pelvic floor contraction with an inhale. Exhale as you relax. After a few contractions, try reversing the technique and coordinate the pelvic floor contraction with an exhale. Inhale. Inhale as you relax.
3. Once you have mastered the technique in a reclining position, try these activities when sitting or lying on your belly. You may have an easier time in some positions than others. Getting on your hands and knees is also a comfortable position for some women.

DON'T GET FRUSTRATED! Muscles have memories! If you have had pelvic pain for a long time, it may take a while for the muscles to fully relax. These muscles are "invisible" to many women. Focusing on the pelvic floor and letting go of the tension will help to decrease the pain.

**POSITIONS TO RELAX
THE PELVIC FLOOR**

1. SQUATTING - Visualize your pelvic floor relaxing. Try to let your feet stay flat on the floor. See if you can hold this for a minute. This is not comfortable if you have prolapse issues.
2. WALL YOGA POSE - Stay in this position for as long as you are comfortable. A pillow under your buttocks might be comfortable. Heat or ice through your groin may help the tissues to relax. (Be sure to protect your skin.)
3. CAT/CAMEL STRETCH - On your hands and knees, gently rock your pelvis forward and back. Make the movements slow and purposeful. Watch your breathing as you go through the motions.
4. THERABALL ACTIVITIES - There are many positions to try! Lying on your back with your knees up on the ball is very comforting. Add a gentle rock side to side.