

WHAT IS *your pelvic floor?*



The pelvic floor is essentially a group of muscles integrated together to create a support structure for the intra-abdominal organs. These muscles work like a hammock to brace organs such as the uterus, bladder, and rectum. In doing so, the pelvic floor promotes healthy bowel and bladder control along with comfort during things like penetrative sex. If something goes wrong with your pelvic floor, it can mess with your ability to go to the bathroom normally, with your sex life, and with your general function in that region.

How often should you do pelvic floor exercises? Three to four times a day is the ideal. Try setting a timer on your phone to remind you to do your pelvic floor exercises, or do them alongside something else that you do several times a day too, like making a cup of tea or eating.

KEGELS

HOW TO DO IT: For best results, practice Kegels daily. They can be done anywhere. Begin with holding your Kegels for three seconds at a time, then see if you can work up to ten-second holds.

Sit in a chair with your feet resting on the floor. Relax all of the muscles of your thighs, buttocks, and abdomen. Squeeze the muscles around your anus, as if you are trying to stop from passing gas (ahem). Hold for a count of three, then relax the muscle again. Make sure that you are not squeezing your glute muscles. Now, imagine you are trying to stop a stream of urine. You should feel a squeeze and inward lift of your genitals. Hold for three seconds, then release the muscle again. Now combine steps two and three, squeezing the ring of muscle around your anus and feeling the inward lift of the vagina at the same time. Hold for three seconds, then release both muscles.

PELVIC FLOOR HOLDS

Your pelvic floor consists of both slow and fast-twitch muscle fibers – both of which need a workout in order to be trained. This exercise focuses on strengthening your slow-twitch muscle fibers, which help maintain the necessary tension in your pelvic floor to support your pelvic organs.

HOW TO DO IT: Sit on a chair or stability ball or lie down in a comfortable position. I recommend newbies lie down at the beginning as they may find it easier. Slowly draw up through your pelvic floor muscles, and hold the contraction for five seconds. Then slowly relax, and rest for five seconds. Repeat 10 times. Remember to breathe! The goal is to build up a 10-second hold. Eventually you'll be able to do this exercise sitting, standing or lying down.

PELVIC FLOOR RAPID HOLDS

This exercise works your fast-twitch fibers, which control sudden changes in abdominal pressure, for example when you laugh, cough or sneeze. So we all know how important these ones are!

HOW TO DO IT: Sit or lie down, and perform up to 10 'squeezes', pulling up through your pelvic floor muscles as before. But for this exercise, aim to keep your legs, bum and tummy as soft and relaxed as possible while you contract your pelvic floor. Hold this position for one second, and then relax for one second. Repeat up to 10 times. Again, don't hold your breath!

EVEN MORE *on your pelvic floor*



BASIC HIP TWIST

It might sound simple but this one gives your pelvic floor a thorough workout. Like many other core stability exercises, the basic hip twist is very effective for your pelvic floor because it needs your core and pelvic floor muscles to work together.

HOW TO DO IT: Lie on your back with your knees bent, and your feet shoulder-width apart. With your hips into a neutral position, draw in your pelvic floor muscles and engage your core. Rest your fingertips on your hipbones and gently float one knee out to the side – but only by a few centimeters. If you float your hip too far, your hip bones will push into your hands, so watch out for that sensation and bring your hip back a smidge if so. Yep, it's a teeny, tiny movement – but it works. Do 10 times on each leg.

COFFEE TABLE LIFT

This exercise looks easy, but it's actually a hard-core workout for your core. Like the other core-strengthening exercises here, it works your transverse abdominals, the deepest abdominal muscles that make up your core. And while working them you're also strengthening your pelvic floor muscles.

HOW TO DO IT: Get onto all fours with your hands shoulder-width apart and your knees hip-width apart. Make sure your hips are in a neutral position and your back is flat. Curl your toes under. Breathe in, and then breathe out, drawing in your tummy and pelvic floor muscles, and then lift your knees off the floor. As you breathe in, lower your knees back down. Repeat 10 times.

HIGH KNEES WITH TOE TAP

Here's another brilliant exercise that both strengthens your core and exercises your pelvic floor muscles. I love that it kills two birds with one stone. Win win!

HOW TO DO IT: Stand with your feet hip-width apart, your knees soft and your pelvis in a neutral position. Engage your core and draw in your pelvic floor muscles. Breathe out and gently raise one knee. Next, straighten your leg and tap your toes on the floor three times. Breathe in and lower your leg back down to its starting position. Repeat on the other leg. Aim to do 10 on each leg.

KEGEL BRIDGE

This exercise combines a simple bridge with Kegel exercises to strengthen the glutes, lower back, abdominal muscles, and the pelvic floor.

HOW TO DO IT: Begin lying down on your back with your knees bent and your feet hips-width distance apart. Place your arms down alongside your body with your palms facing down. Take a full inhale then as you exhale, slowly lift your hips up towards the sky to come into a bridge position. Once you've exhaled all of the air out of your lungs, hold your bridge position as you lift your pelvic floor up and in. Hold for three seconds, then release your pelvic floor first. Slowly come out of your bridge on an inhale. Repeat for a total of five repetitions (Build up to 10).