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**Women's**  
Health and Wellness

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**PELVIC FLOOR**  
**EXERCISES**



EMPOWERING  
**WOMEN'S** Health,  
Lives

## WHAT IS IT?

Pelvic floor exercises are movements designed to strengthen the muscles and tissues that support key organs in the pelvic area, including the bladder, uterus, and rectum. These muscles, known as the pelvic floor muscles, are essential for maintaining continence (control over urination and bowel movements), supporting sexual health, and preventing or alleviating pelvic pain. For women, pelvic floor exercises are especially important during and after pregnancy, as the added pressure from the growing baby and the act of childbirth can weaken or stretch these muscles.

## WHAT HAPPENS?

During pregnancy, the weight of the growing baby can place extra pressure on the pelvic floor muscles, which may lead to weakness, stretching, or loss of tone. Childbirth, especially vaginal deliveries, can stretch these muscles further. In some cases, this can result in pelvic floor dysfunction, which can cause problems such as urinary incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse (when the bladder, uterus, or rectum drops into the vaginal space), and sexual health issues like decreased sensation or pain.

Pelvic floor exercises help to restore strength and elasticity to these muscles, reducing the risks of these complications and promoting quicker recovery postpartum.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH IT & EXPERT GUIDANCE

- **Understanding the Pelvic Floor Muscles:** Before starting any exercises, it's important to identify the pelvic floor muscles. These are the muscles that you use to stop urination midstream or prevent passing gas. Practicing contracting these muscles in a relaxed state helps you learn how to isolate and engage them.

**Tip for Identification:** The next time you're using the bathroom, try stopping the flow of urine for a few seconds. The muscles you use are your pelvic floor muscles. Once you know where these muscles are, you can begin working on strengthening them.

- **Kegel Exercises:** Kegels are the most common pelvic floor exercises and involve repeatedly contracting and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles. Here's how to do them:

**Find a Comfortable Position:** You can perform Kegels while lying down, sitting, or standing—whichever is most comfortable for you.

**Contract Your Pelvic Floor Muscles:** Tighten the muscles as though you're trying to stop the flow of urine or hold in gas. Hold the contraction for 5 seconds.

**Relax the Muscles:** Release the contraction completely for about 5 seconds, and then repeat. Start by doing 10 repetitions.

**Gradually Increase Intensity:** As your muscles get stronger, try to increase the hold time to 10 seconds, and aim for 3 sets of 10 repetitions a day.

**Tip:** Avoid holding your breath or tightening your stomach, legs, or buttocks while doing Kegels. Focus on isolating the pelvic floor muscles.

- **Advanced Pelvic Floor Exercises:** Once you're comfortable with basic Kegels, you can incorporate more advanced exercises to target your pelvic floor muscles in different ways:

**Bridge Pose:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips towards the ceiling while engaging your pelvic floor muscles. Hold for a few seconds, then lower your hips back to the ground.

**Squats:** Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Slowly squat down, engaging your pelvic floor muscles as you lower your body, and rise back up. Keep your knees in line with your toes and avoid letting them extend beyond your feet.

- **Consistency and Patience:** Pelvic floor exercises require consistent effort to see results. For postpartum recovery, it's typically advised to begin pelvic floor exercises as soon as your doctor clears you—often after the first six weeks. However, it's important to start slowly and gradually increase the intensity. Be patient and realistic about your progress—muscle recovery and strengthening take time, especially after childbirth.

**Tip:** Doing these exercises regularly, even if it's just for a few minutes a day, can have lasting benefits. If you're ever unsure about your technique or progress, consider seeking help from a physical therapist who specializes in pelvic health.

- **Signs You Might Need Professional Help:** If you experience ongoing symptoms such as urinary leakage, pelvic heaviness, or discomfort during sex despite performing pelvic floor exercises, it's important to consult a pelvic floor specialist or physical therapist. These professionals can help assess your muscle function, guide you through proper exercises, and provide treatments to address any dysfunction.

## Expert Tip

Pelvic floor exercises are not just for mothers after childbirth. They are beneficial for women at all stages of life—whether you're preparing for childbirth, recovering from pregnancy, or simply maintaining pelvic health as you age.