

ALL ABOUT "KEGELS"

These exercises were originally developed by Dr. Arnold Kegel (Kay'-gill) to help women with problems controlling urination. They are designed to strengthen and give you voluntary control of a muscle called Pubococcygeus (pew-bo-kak-se-gee'-us) or P.C. for short. The P.C. muscle is part of the sling of muscle stretching from your pubic bone in front to your tailbone in back. Since the muscle encircles not only the urinary opening, but also the outside of the vagina, some of Dr. Kegel's patients found that doing the exercises had a pleasant side effect---increased sexual awareness.

WHY DO KEGEL EXERCISES?

Learning Kegel Exercises:

- Can help you be more aware of feelings in your genital area.
- You will be better able to respond to the sensations of birth.
- Can increase circulation in the genital area, which will increase the healing of lacerations or stitches after birth.
- May help increase sexual arousal started by other kinds of stimulation.
- Can be helpful after childbirth to restore muscle tone in the vagina.

IDENTIFYING THE P.C. MUSCLE:

Sit on the toilet. Spread your legs apart. See if you can stop and start the flow of urination without moving your legs. That's your P.C. muscle, the one that turns the flow off and on. If you don't find it the first time, don't give up; try again the next time you have to urinate.

THE EXERCISES:

Slow Kegels: Tighten the P.C. muscle as you did to stop urine. Hold it for a slow count of three. Relax it.

Quick Kegels: Tighten and relax the P.C. muscle as rapidly as you can.

Pull in/Push out: Pull up the entire pelvic floor as though trying to suck water into your vagina. Then push out or bear down as if trying to push the imaginary water out. This exercise will use a number of "stomach" or abdominal muscles as well as the P.C. muscle.

At first, do each one of these exercises (one set) five times every day. Each week increase the number of times you do each exercise by five (15,20,25, etc.) Keep doing five sets each day.

* You can do these exercises any time during daily activities which don't require a lot of moving around; driving, watching t.v., doing dishes, sitting in school or at your desk, or lying in bed.

* When you start you will probably notice that the muscle doesn't want to stay "contracted" during slow kegels and that you can't do quick kegels very fast or evenly. Keep at it. In a week or two, you will probably notice you can control it quite well.

* Sometimes the muscle will start to feel a little tired. Not surprising. You probably haven't used it very much before. Take a few seconds rest and start again.

* A good way to check on how you are doing is to insert one or two lubricated fingers into your vagina. You will feel the opening to your vagina get smaller as you tighten your P.C. muscle.

* If you have trouble remembering to do your kegels, try writing "K" on a small piece of paper and placing them around the house, in your car, in your purse, on your desk, etc. Every time you see a "K" you will be reminded to do your kegel's.

-Adapted from Human Sexuality Program, UCSF