



Pelvic muscles need strengthening too

By Stacia Soliday, ARNP



Most women who have had children have felt it — the fear of sneezing, jogging or jumping on a trampoline with your kids due to bladder leakage. Weakness of the pelvic and vaginal muscles, especially after childbirth, is a very common problem affecting 25 million American women of all age groups. Through aging, being overweight and continued birth trauma, muscles can get so weak that incontinence is a way of life. This is no way to live.

Incontinence, even during strenuous activity, is not a normal part of aging or motherhood. It is preventable, and better yet, often reversible!

What is a Pelvic Floor?

“Pelvic Floor” is a term doctors use to describe the complex muscle network of the pelvis responsible for bladder and bowel control, as well as sexual function. When muscles are weak, these problems can arise...

- Urinary Incontinence
- Bowel Problems
- Pelvic Organ Prolapse
- Decreased Sexual Satisfaction & Function

Incontinence

If your pelvic floor is healthy, you should have good urinary control by sensing fullness and being able to comfortably make it to the bathroom without rushing or leaking. You should also be able to hold urine while running, sneezing or exercising. If you leak urine under any circumstances, see a doctor to rule out infection, neurological disease or pelvic abnormality. If you have none of these, your healthcare provider can help you find a solution through many means including surgery, medication or, the most common — pelvic muscle exercises called Kegels.

Bowel Problems

Embarrassing, but true — when pelvic floor muscles are weak, loss of gas and bowel control becomes more common. You may find this problem difficult to talk about even with your healthcare provider, but know that they can help by prescribing exercises to improve muscle strength or by referring you to a Physical Therapy specialist who can give you real solutions to this nightmare.

Pelvic Organ Prolapse

When the pelvic muscles are so weak they can no longer support the uterus, it is possible that the uterus will “prolapse” or fall out of the vagina. Though doctors don’t see this as a medical emergency, it is embarrassing, uncomfortable and abnormal. If you are feeling vaginal heaviness or have tissue protruding from the vagina, contact your healthcare provider. There are ways to handle this problem through surgery or use of a device called a pessary.

Decreased Sexual Satisfaction and Function

It makes sense. If pelvic muscles are weak, sexual satisfaction will likely be lessened. To make sure you and your partner are enjoying the optimum sexual experience, pelvic muscles need to be strong and healthy. This can be achieved through exercises called Kegels.

Kegels are performed by contracting and releasing your pelvic floor muscles. To exercise these muscles, squeeze them internally as if you’re trying to keep from urinating. Hold this squeeze for 10 seconds then rest for ten seconds. Do as many sets of 10 contractions a day as you like or talk to your provider — they may have a more specific plan for you to follow.

As for Kegels, you can do them anywhere, any time. While you watch TV, do the dishes or ride in a car. Just like any exercise, you must continue to do them to keep your muscles strong. It will likely take six to eight weeks to notice a change in bladder control, but keep with it.

If you’re not seeing improvement, you may be contracting the wrong muscles. The Pelvic Floor is very complex and your healthcare provider can help you to isolate the correct muscles for optimum results. Specialists, such as Lincoln Physical Therapy director Mary Jo Jeffrey, may also be brought in to help you identify the correct muscles and build an exercise program to take back your life and normal activities. Talk to your provider for a referral.

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