



## Kegel Exercises for Urinary Incontinence

### What are Kegel exercises?

Kegel exercises involve the voluntary contraction and relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles. Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles that support the urethra, bladder, uterus, and rectum.

### Why do Kegel exercises?

Weak pelvic floor muscles contribute to urine incontinence (leakage). Doing Kegel exercises correctly and regularly will reduce or eliminate urine leakage and may prevent the need for surgery. Doing the exercise is risk-free, painless and free!

### How do I learn to do the exercises?

It is often helpful to work with a health care provider who can teach you the technique and help you learn which muscles to use. Place a finger inside the vagina and squeeze the muscles. When you feel pressure around your finger, you are using the correct muscles. Squeeze the muscles for a count of four and relax for a count of four. Try to keep the other muscles in the area relaxed. Do not bear down or squeeze your thigh, back or abdominal muscles. Breathe slowly and deeply. Initially you can do the exercises with your knees together. You can do the exercises while sitting or lying down. Initially you may have difficulty maintaining the muscle contraction for a count of four but it will get easier as the muscle strength improves.

### How often should I do the exercises?

It is recommended that you do two five-minute sessions daily. Most women find that it is easiest to do them at a regular time every day, usually in the morning and evening. While it is true that they can be done anytime, anywhere, not doing them on a regular schedule increases the chance that you will forget or skip sessions. You may have some difficulty doing the exercises for the full five minutes initially. Don't get discouraged - just keep practicing and as muscle strength improves you will reach your goal.

### When should I expect improvement in my symptoms?

It takes 6-12 weeks for most women to notice a change in urine loss. Don't give up! These exercises can prevent you from having surgery. Once you have attained your goal, you can do the exercises for five minutes, three times a week. If you start experiencing urine loss again, increase the frequency.

### Is there anything I should change once the exercises become easy?

You can further strengthen the muscles by squeezing to a count of eight and relaxing for a count of eight. Repeat this for five minutes, twice daily. Doing the exercises with your knees apart will also work the muscles more.

### Helpful hints

- Listen to music when you do the exercises.
- Keep a calendar or chart and give yourself a checkmark or star each time you do the exercises. This helps keep you motivated. A chart is provided on the back page of this handout.
- If you stop doing the exercises, start again! Remember, it takes regular practice to see results.

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>

PLEASE RECORD THE TOTAL TIME SPENT DURING EACH SESSION IN THE BOXES PROVIDED:

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