

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy **“Coached Kegel Exercises”**

The muscles that support the pelvic organs are part of a system of connective tissue, muscles and ligaments called the *“pelvic floor”*. The *pelvic floor supports*: the bladder, vagina, uterus and rectum. Just like other muscles in our body, it is very important for women to exercise their pelvic floor muscles throughout their life. Pelvic floor exercises are also called Kegel exercises. Unfortunately, because the pelvic muscles are hidden from view, it is difficult to know if you are doing them correctly.

Specially-trained physical therapists help patients learn how to perform these exercises and provide feedback about strength-training.

Here are some tips:

- Try to stop your urinary stream. If you succeed then you have identified the right muscles to exercise. This is a learning tool. Do not stop your urine stream frequently, as there is concern that this may create a problem with bladder emptying.
- Imagine you are going to pass gas, then, squeeze the muscles that would prevent that gas from escaping from your rectum. Exercising the muscles around the rectum will also strengthen those around the vagina and bladder.
- Use a hand mirror to look at your vaginal opening and perineum (the muscle wall between the vagina and rectum). You should see the perineum lift up when you contract your pelvic muscles.
- Remember not to tighten your stomach, back and buttock muscles or squeeze your legs together. *Don't forget to breathe!*
- Insert a finger in to your vagina and feel the muscles on the bottom of your vagina tighten or “lift up”.

Kegel Exercises require repetition to be effective. Hold each squeeze for 5-10 seconds and repeat this 10 times, three times a day. (You may start at 3-4 seconds and build up over time to 10 seconds.) Don't get frustrated – exercising is always difficult at the beginning, but becomes more exciting as you see improvement.

Consider getting a trainer for your pelvic floor. Ask your doctor for a referral to a specialized physical therapist who can evaluate how your core muscles, gait and posture affect your pelvic floor function.