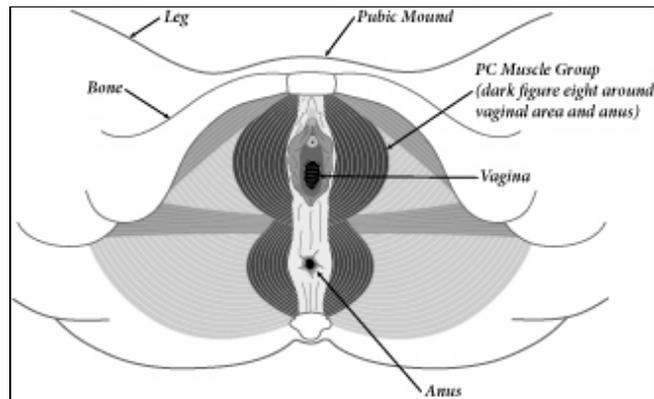


# Pelvic Floor Exercises

Your pelvic floor is a strong sling of muscles called the pubococcygeal (PC) muscles that run between your pubic bone and tailbone and surrounds the openings of your vagina and rectum. Exercising your pelvic floor in pregnancy helps these muscles stretch smoothly around the baby's head when you give birth, minimizing the chance of tearing. After your give birth, these exercises help restore pelvic muscle tone, and speed the healing of your perineum. These exercises (called Kegels) have other benefits as well, like reducing incontinence and improving orgasm. Regular Kegels should be a life-long component of every woman's health.



## Finding the Muscles of the Pelvic Floor

If you've never done Kegels before, figuring out just exactly where these muscles are can be tricky. Contract your muscles as though trying to keep yourself from urinating. If you can do that, you've found them! You can also try stopping and starting the flow of urine when you're peeing, but only do this a few times for the purpose of making sure you have the right spot. Stopping the flow of urine shouldn't be a part of your regular Kegel routine. You can also insert a finger into your vagina— when you've got the right spot you will feel a squeeze on your fingers. If you struggle to find the pelvic floor muscles, keep on practicing. As the muscles get stronger, they will get easier to find.

## Types of Kegels

It is important to do a variety of different types of Kegels:

- *Flicks*: Contract and release the muscles in quick flicks. Do this whenever you remember.
- *Elevator*: Imagine the pelvic floor as a sling running between the pubic bone and the tailbone. Draw the sling upwards, like an elevator, floor-by-floor, to the fifth or sixth floor. Then bring the elevator down all the way to the basement. Rest for 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times a day.
- *Kangaroo Kegels*: Imagine you are a kangaroo and slowly raise your tail up into the air and back down again, without raising any dust. Repeat ten times.
- *Super Kegels*: Contract the muscles and hold for up to 30 seconds, then relax for 30 seconds. Repeat this cycle 10 times a day. Even when toned, these muscle fibres tire quickly, so it may take some time to work up to a full 30-second contraction. Try not to tighten the muscles of the legs, buttocks, or abdomen, or to hold your breath.
- *Pelvic Floor Bulging*: This is a rehearsal for the "letting go" in the birth process that is only necessary in the last few weeks of pregnancy. After doing a Super Kegel, consciously bulge your pelvic floor by holding your breath and gently straining as if to press your pelvic floor down to the floor, or as though you were blowing up a balloon through your pelvic floor.

## But I can never remember to do them....

Remembering to do these exercises is the most challenging part. Pick something you do on a regular basis (like brushing your teeth, washing your hands, bathing your kids, or reading in bed) that you can use as a trigger to remind you to do your exercises. Until it becomes a habit, post up a sticky note somewhere to remind you.