

## Living With Incontinence – Pelvic Floor Exercises

Pelvic floor exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles located around the bladder opening. By exercising these muscles, symptoms may improve. In order to get the maximum benefit from these exercises, it is very important to perform them correctly.

### How to Identify Pelvic Floor Muscles

You can identify the muscles located around the bladder opening by starting and stopping your urine stream. If you are able to stop your stream you are using your pelvic floor muscles. Stopping your urine stream is only a way to identify the pelvic floor muscles. Flow-stopping should not be used as an exercise.

Another way to identify the muscles used for pelvic floor exercises is to tighten the muscles around your back passage (as when holding back wind or at the end of a bowel movement). Because they are part of the same muscle group, the muscles around the back passage always work with the muscles located around the bladder opening.

A proper pelvic floor squeeze also lifts upwards as it squeezes. A hand mirror may be useful to see if you can notice an upward movement when contracting pelvic floor muscles.

When you are doing a pelvic floor muscle contraction, it helps to pull your bellybutton in towards your spine at the same time. This tummy action will help to achieve a get a better pelvic floor muscle contraction.

When muscles are weak, it's often difficult to know if they are actually working or not. It may take several tries to locate these muscles. Try not to use your stomach, buttock, or leg muscles.

A health care provider can help if you have difficulty identifying your pelvic floor muscles.

### Types of Pelvic Floor Exercises

There are different types of pelvic floor exercises: the quick pelvic floor exercises and the slow pelvic floor exercises. Every pelvic floor muscle squeeze needs to be done as strongly as you possible can. This is called a maximal squeeze and it is the **ONLY** way that muscle strength can be improved.

In performing the quick exercises, the pelvic floor muscles are rapidly tightened and relaxed. During the slow exercises, the muscles are tightened for 6 seconds and then relaxed. Try to complete six maximal slow squeezes, three times a day as well as six fast squeezes. Pelvic floor exercises may be done with other activities, such as watching television, ironing, or relaxing.

It may take several weeks to notice an improvement, however important to continue doing these exercises.