

LET'S TALK ABOUT KEGELS



"Kegels are a very mainstream concept, but unfortunately many people don't really know what a Kegel exercise program looks like," explains Dr. Mallory Hertz, PT, DPT, of FYZICAL® Therapy & Balance Centers. "In fact, only about 20 percent of women actually know how to perform a Kegel correctly. And traditionally, physicians assess the pelvic floor for healing, infection, or pain, but don't assess or teach the muscle contraction."

First, it's important to understand the role of the pelvic floor muscles. They are considered the foundation for your core, and play a role in:

- Stability of the pelvis with movements, such as walking, running, and dancing
- Control of your bladder and bowel
- Support for pelvic organs
- Sexual function

Your pelvic floor muscles can be strained or weakened by continual heavy lifting, straining on the toilet, high impact exercise, obesity, and especially pregnancy and childbirth. But, just like the rest of your core, or any other muscle, you can strengthen the muscles of your pelvic floor.

Simply put, a Kegel is a pelvic floor muscle contraction. Contracting these muscles gives you the sensation of holding back pee or a fart. "Thinking about these cues is often effective in helping patients

to find the Kegel muscles," Dr. Hertz explains. "The motion will likely be slight, especially at first, so it's often a tendency to want to use other muscles like the abs or glutes to 'help.' But, it's important to just isolate those pelvic floor muscles."

Though "Kegels" are common knowledge, the details of a proper exercise program are rarely understood and leave people with the impression that Kegels don't work. A proper Kegel exercise program is made of two types of contractions: quick and long. Thirty percent of the muscle cells in the pelvic floor are your quick contract muscle fibers, the sprinters. The other seventy percent are the long contraction fibers, the marathon runners. So, it's important to train both types of fibers through both quick contractions and longer holds. Research also recommends at least 80-100 repetitions per day to truly make a change in that muscle.

"In the first 4-6 weeks of training, your nerves will become more efficient, meaning they will start recruiting the available muscle cells. You don't actually gain strength in that first part of training, but you just start to more effectively use what you already have available," explains Dr. Hertz. "The next 4-6 months is where true strength gains occur through the addition of muscle cells that beef up that muscle tissue."

"If you do them correctly – for the proper amount of time and frequency – Kegels can be very effective and they're pretty simple to do. Our goal is to help the people who need us," Dr. Hertz affirms.

If you have questions on Kegels or want help ensuring you're using correct form, contact Dr. Hertz and the team at FYZICAL® Therapy & Balance Centers.

