

## Pelvic Floor (Kegel) Exercise Instruction for Men

### Your Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor muscles provide support for the contents of the abdomen and pelvis, act as a constrictor mechanism to control urination and bowel movements, and are involved in sexual function. It can be difficult to identify or learn how to contract these muscles correctly (a pelvic floor contraction is also called a Kegel contraction).

A helpful way to benefit from pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises is to look at the learning process in four steps:

**STEP ONE: Learning how to contract and relax your pelvic floor muscles.**

**STEP TWO: Learning how to maintain a pelvic floor contraction.**

**STEP THREE: Using your pelvic floor to help with bowel or bladder control issues.**

**STEP FOUR: Increasing pelvic floor strength and endurance.**

### **STEP ONE: Learning how to contract and relax your pelvic floor muscles.**

The first step is simply learning to contract and relax the correct muscles. The next step is learning how to maintain the contraction. You can learn to contract the muscle when lying down, sitting, or standing – whichever you find easiest. Most people find the easiest way to learn how to contract this muscle group is in lying or sitting and either tightening the area between the anus and testicles (the perineum) or simply tightening the ring of muscle around their anus. The buttock muscles (gluteals), inner thigh or upper abdominal muscles should not be tightening. Your breathing should not be involved. The following are cues that many people find helpful:

1. Tighten the perineum (area between anus and testicles)
2. Tighten the anus
3. Tighten base of penis into your body
4. Do the contraction “crispily”
5. After contracting, relax the whole pelvic floor. Do you clearly feel the muscle relax?

If you are unsure or having difficulty in identifying the correct muscles the following can be helpful:

- While sitting, touch the area between your anus and testicles. You should feel a rope-like bulge form under your fingers when you contract. This rope-like bulge is part of the pelvic floor.
- Reach your hands around to your buttocks and pull your buttock cheeks apart until you feel a stretch at your anal sphincter. This is where you want to contract. Now tighten your anal sphincter where you feel the stretch. If done correctly, this is a pelvic floor contraction. Initially you might only feel the muscles at the back by the anus tightening.

As your skill improves, you will realize that the muscles that stop both urine and a bowel movement are tightening and work together.

- When peeing, tighten your muscles that stop the flow of urine. If done correctly, this is a pelvic floor contraction. Initially you might only feel the muscles at the front towards the urethra or at the back towards the anus. As your skill improves, you will realize that both areas are involved and work together.
- As your awareness and skill improve, as soon as you are able, wean from using the above cues. It will be important to be able to control your pelvic floor without having to touch your genitals or anus! And it is important to be able to contract your pelvic floor **before** urine is leaving your bladder and to ensure complete bladder emptying when voiding.

It is really important to make sure that you are not leading with or tightening your upper abdominal, buttock or inner thigh muscles when trying to identify and contract your pelvic floor. Be sure you are breathing normally. When your pelvic floor contracts you will also feel your lower abdominal muscles gently tightening along with your anus, perineum, testicles, and base of your penis. All of these areas are meant to contract together.

Another important concept is to focus on the sensation of the muscle contraction in the correct area and not to focus on strength. Trying to do a “strong” pelvic floor contraction often results in the wrong muscles being contracted (upper abdominals, buttock, and inner thigh muscles) as well as making it difficult to breathe normally. A stronger pelvic floor muscle contraction is simply a more definite sensation in the correct area.

It is also very important that when you relax the muscle you have a definite feeling of your perineum and anus relaxing. If you cannot feel this relax, this might mean that your contraction was not correct.

Develop skill in contracting and relaxing your pelvic floor in lying, sitting, and standing. Start in the position that is easiest for you and then progress to the other positions as your skill improves. It is important to be able to control this muscle in all positions and when doing activities where bladder or bowel control is needed.

Many people initially find that one of the above cues works better for them than another and that the resulting contraction from different cues feels different. However, with practice most people report that as skill improves, all cues create the same or very similar sensations. Each person’s body experience is unique to them. It is important to find the cue and location that work for you!

A pelvic floor contraction can be very hard to learn simply from verbal and written instruction. If you are not sure if you are contracting correctly, it is recommended that you see a pelvic floor physiotherapist to ensure you have correct technique prior to beginning step two and three below. It can be difficult to learn to identify and contract your pelvic floor on your own.

## **STEP TWO: Learning how to maintain a pelvic floor contraction.**

Once you can contract and relax your pelvic floor, you are now ready to learn to maintain the contraction. The muscle will not remain tightened simply because you contracted it. You need to learn how to keep the muscle contracted. This is important for bladder and bowel control and to improve muscle strength. It is often best to start maintaining the contraction for 1-3 seconds at approximately 60% of a full contraction. With practice you can gradually increase your ability until you can maintain the contraction for 10 seconds at 80% or more of a maximum contraction, always ensuring that you feel a good relaxation. When initiating the contraction, it can be helpful to calmly increase the contraction rather than rapidly contracting fully and then trying to maintain it. Again, practice in lying, sitting, and standing. Start in the position that is easiest for you and then progress to the other positions.

It is also really important that when you relax the muscle you have a definite feeling of your perineum and anus relaxing. If you cannot feel it relaxing this means that the contraction has dissipated while you were attempting to maintain it.

## **STEP THREE: Using your pelvic floor to help with bowel or bladder control issues.**

Now that you have developed skill and control with your pelvic floor, you can use your pelvic floor to help with bowel or bladder control. Make sure that you contract your pelvic floor muscles prior to any activity that is associated with incontinence. Often these are things like coughing, sneezing, going from sitting to standing, bending, squatting, lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling. Contract your pelvic floor immediately prior to the activity(s) that cause you to leak, maintain the contraction during the activity and only release the contraction once the activity is over. Again, it is important that you have a definite feeling of letting the muscle go when you release the contraction.

## **STEP FOUR: Increasing pelvic floor strength and endurance.**

When you are able to maintain a 10 second pelvic floor contraction, you are ready to progress to increasing strength and endurance.

While standing, contract your pelvic floor for 10 seconds at 80% or more of a maximum contraction, then rest 10 seconds. Do this 10 times in a row. Then rest 30 seconds. Repeat this 3 times for a total of 30, 10 second contractions. Repeat on alternate days.

Make sure you are breathing normally, and your buttock, inner thigh and upper abdominal muscles are not involved. When you relax the muscle, you should have a definite feeling of letting go. It can take up to three months of regular practice to see the benefits of improved strength.

## **Prostate Cancer Supportive Care (PCSC) Program**

Physiotherapy for bladder and bowel control concerns related to prostate cancer is available to anyone in British Columbia at no charge in the Prostate Cancer Supportive Care Program. Services are offered both in person and on-line. A physician referral is **not** required. Medical interpreters are provided if required.

Please call 604-875-4485 to schedule an appointment.

The Prostate Cancer Supportive Care (PCSC) Program provides support for many aspects of a prostate cancer diagnosis and treatment. If you are interested in learning about or attending any of the modules below, please call 604-875-4485 or have a look online at

[www.pcscprogram.ca](http://www.pcscprogram.ca)

### **The PCSC Program includes the following modules:**

Module 1-Introduction to Prostate Cancer & Primary Treatment Options

Module 2-Managing the Impact of Prostate Cancer Treatments on Sexual Function and Intimacy

Module 3-Exercise for Prostate Cancer Patients

Module 4-Recognition & Management of Treatment Related Sides Effects of Androgen Deprivation Therapy (ADT)

Module 5-Pelvic Floor Physiotherapy for Bladder and Bowel Concerns

Module 6-Counselling Services

Module 7-Metastatic Disease Management

Module 8-Nutrition Advice for Prostate Cancer Patients