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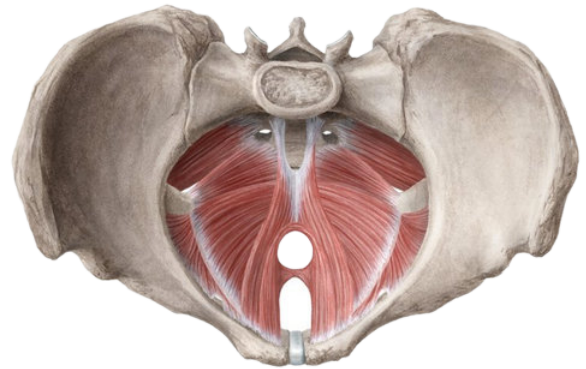
# TO KEGEL OR NOT TO KEGEL

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## WHAT IS A KEGEL AND SHOULD I DO THEM?

Kegel exercises are voluntary muscle contractions that activate the pelvic floor muscles. There are 3 layers of the pelvic floor muscles, the deepest of which are activated during Kegels. As with any skeletal muscle, in order to have optimal and effective contraction, the pelvic floor muscles must be able to both relax to their full length, and contract to their full capacity. For example, imagine holding a weight in your arm, you want to support the weight and be able to move the elbow from a fully bent position through a fully straight position. If you held your elbow at half way and repeatedly bent it to your maximum, you end up with too much tightness. If you only bend your elbow from straight to half way you are not building full strength.

We want to have strength through the full length of the muscles. The same is true for the the pelvic floor. In order to decide if you should be doing Kegels, it is crucial to know if your pelvic floor system is hypertonic (overactive/too tight) or hypotonic (underactive/too weak). The following are symptoms associated with each pelvic floor state.



## WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

### Hypertonic (overactive) Pelvic Floor

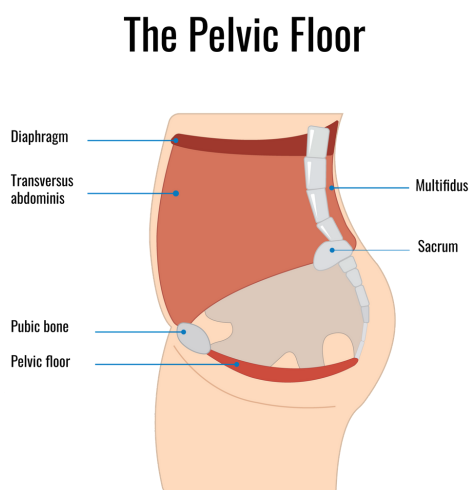
- Difficulty starting to pee or second pee.
- Constipation
- Pain with intercourse.
- Pain with inserting a tampon.
- Increased UTI risk due to retention of urine.
- Leaking with sneezing, coughing, jumping, or heavy lifting.
- Having to push when having a bowel movement.
- Feels like you can't get a good contraction.
- Difficult to get a full deep breath in.
- Persistent SI joint pain, hip pain, or back pain unrelated to a specific injury.

**IF THIS DESCRIBES YOU**, it is important to first learn how to relax and release the tension and tightness in your pelvic floor. The key to this is an effective breathing strategy. With a hypertonic pelvic floor, **doing Kegel exercises can contribute to worsening symptoms** and are not advised. If you are unsure, ask your doctor to check for tightness on your next exam AND a Pelvic Health Physical Therapy assessment is recommended. Specially trained Pelvic Physical Therapists are skilled at assessing the pelvis and prescribing an individualized treatment program to address your symptoms.



## Hypotonic (underactive) Pelvic Floor

- Leaking with sneezing, coughing, jumping or heavy lifting.
- Tampons falling out.
- Sex “not feeling like it used to before kids.”
- Persistent SI joint pain, hip pain, or back pain.
- Heavy feeling, shaking or pressure inside the vagina.



**IF THIS DESCRIBES YOU**, kegel (lifting contraction) strengthening your pelvic floor is advised. To perform a Kegel, while you are sitting up, visualize a marble at your anus and a ping pong ball at the vaginal opening. With your inhale, relax the pelvic floor (allowing the marble and ping pong to "lower"), and as you exhale, squeeze AND "lift" the marble and ping pong ball up. As you continue to breathe, try to hold the balls up for 5-10 sec and repeat 10 times. The intended goal is to be able to perform 3 sets of 10 sec holds once a day. It is common for it to take some time to coordinate and effectively engage the muscles. It also takes consistency and time to strengthen. A pelvic health physical therapist can tailor a program to meet you where you are at. They can also assess, educate, and help manage issues associated with weakness such as Pelvic Organ Prolapse.

## **PELVIC HEALTH PHYSIOTHERAPY CONDITION MANAGEMENT**

**Ask your Doctor if Pelvic Health Physiotherapy is right for you. It is advised to have an assessment with a Pelvic Health Therapist if you are experiencing the following conditions:**

- Persistent Pelvic Pain
- Pelvic Organ Prolapse
- Rectus Diastasis
- Leaking with laughing, coughing, sneezing (Urinary Stress Incontinence)
- Leaking after the urge to pee and having to void NOW!
- Pre and Post Natal changing bodies
- Persistent and unexplained chronic low back or hip pain
- Painful intercourse

Check out our Mommy Muscle Online 6 week Program if you are looking for a individualized Inner Core Retraining Program to give you the foundational skills to be able to help you get back to any activity that you love safely and efficiently. This program was built by Mom's for Mom's, and was developed by Pelvic Health Physiotherapists at Elevation Health and a Pre and Post Natal Exercise Specialist of Core Endurance.

**\*Note: This rebuilding program is best fit for those NOT experiencing significant symptoms from the above in the list under Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Condition Management. If significant symptoms are present, it is advised to seek out a Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Assessment first to make the Mommy Muscle program the most effective.**