

## Prenatal Pelvic Floor Exercises

*Developing strength in the pelvic floor.*

Pelvic floor exercises are sometimes called Kegel exercises, named after Dr. Thomas Kegel, the OB/Gyn who first developed them in 1948. The stronger these muscles become the easier it will be to consciously relax them in childbirth. Exercising these muscles during pregnancy will aid in postnatal recovery and help prevent bladder problems as you age. Experts recommend doing between 50 and 300 a day for the rest of your life. We will do between 100 – 150 in each class.

### Locating the pelvic floor muscles

The pelvic floor supports all of the abdominal organs and uterus like a shelf, to find these muscles imagine you are going to the bathroom and the phone rings and you have to stop to run and answer the phone, the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine are the correct muscles, but please note that you will not want to regularly stop urine like this because it can cause urinary tract infections. Using the muscles to lift the pelvic floor is called a "Kegel."

### How to isolate these muscles

In the past you may have been instructed to contract and relax the pelvic floor to perform a "Kegel", however it has been proven that there is a more efficient way to practice these exercises by isolating the parts of the pelvic floor:

- ❖ **First** tighten the muscles of the pelvic floor as if you were trying to hold back a bowel movement.
- ❖ **Follow** this by tightening the muscles that you would use to hold back urine.
- ❖ **Then** slowly relax these muscles. As you do this exercise keep your lower abdomen and inner thighs relaxed.

In birth we want to be able to contract the transverse abdominal muscles while relaxing the pelvic floor muscles. The first step in being able to do this is to separate the messages from your brain to these muscles. Try to keep the abdominals and inner thighs relaxed while lifting the pelvic floor muscles.

**If you have questions about yoga please contact a certified prenatal yoga teacher.**

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### Best positions for practice

Pelvic floor exercises can be practiced in any position, anywhere and anytime. The ideal positions for practicing these exercises are those that allow the pelvic floor to be in a relaxed position or those that cause the abdominal organs to be lifted off of the pelvic floor. Squatting places the pelvic floor in a complete relaxed position. Knees to Chest and All-Fours positions are good for those with weak pelvic floor.



### The Exercises

Stoplights are a great place to practice! We also recommend doing pelvic floor exercises immediately after birth as they help heal the pelvic floor even in cases where there is tearing or episiotomy.

**Pulsing** – Tighten and release the pelvic floor repeatedly while breathing normally. You can do them in sets of 10 or time them in 1-minute increments. (Start with this exercise, as it is the easiest to do if your pelvic floor muscles are weak.)

**Lifting** – Inhale, tighten and lift the pelvic floor muscles. As you exhale with a "birthing breath" slowly release the muscles. Be sure to continue inhaling as you contract. Do not hold your breath. Repeat 5 times.

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