

PELVIC FLOOR INFORMATION

I have had a lot of requests for information on Pelvic floor exercises, benefits, and how to perform strengthening and cardio exercises. Most people think only women struggle with pelvic floor issues, but that simply is not the truth as both men and women struggle. Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can help urinary incontinence, treat pelvic organ prolapse, and make sex better too. Everyone can benefit from doing pelvic floor exercises.

A few benefits of pelvic floor exercises:

1. Improves bladder and bowel control
2. Improve recovery from childbirth or gynecological surgery
3. In men improves recovery from prostate surgery
4. May help increase sexual sensation
5. Helps increase social confidence
6. Helps improve overall quality of life

It is very common for doctors to prescribe physical therapy when a person continues to suffer from pelvic floor problems. I strongly suggest learning where exactly your pelvic floor muscles are located, attending physical therapy for a short while, meeting with a trainer, and practicing these exercises over and over.

The pelvic floor muscles are located between the tailbone and the pubic bone within the pelvis. They support the bowel and bladder (as well as the uterus and vagina in females).

You can also quickly identify the pelvic floor muscles by trying to stop the flow of urine while emptying your bladder. If you can do it for a second or two, you are using the correct muscles. (Do not do this repeatedly, or more than once a week.)

The pelvic floor can be damaged when it receives excessive pressure, stress, or injuries in any of the structures of the pelvic area. For example, Episodes of intense sneezing or coughing, childbirth, or regularly taking part in high impact sports like running or sports that involve an overabundance of plyometrics.

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Pelvic floor friendly cardio exercises

Pelvic floor friendly cardio exercises

- walking
- swimming
- seated cycling
- cross trainer (low resistance)
- low intensity water aerobics
- walking in the water
- low impact exercise classes

Cardio exercises that can overload your pelvic floor

- running
- jumping
- star jumps
- skipping
- boxing
- high impact exercise classes that involve running and jumping
- sports involving stop-start running and rapid direction change (e.g. tennis, netball, basketball, hockey, touch football)

The pelvic floor and core exercises

Your abdominal muscle strength may exceed the ability of your pelvic floor. There are several ways to modify your core exercises to protect your pelvic floor:

- Cease strong abdominal (tummy) exercises
- Reduce the level of your tummy muscle exercise program
- **Avoid breath-holding by exhaling with effort**
- **Maintain good posture**
- **Lift your *pelvic floor* first and hold it during the exercise, then relax afterwards**
- Notice how many repetitions you can do before your pelvic floor muscles tire. You may need to add some rests, or reduce the number of repetitions you do in a row, while your pelvic floor muscle fitness improves.

Pelvic floor friendly core exercises

- single leg extension with one leg supported by a hand on stationary knee or moving foot on ball
- knees side to side with feet on ball
- modified plank on hands or knees with a slight bend at the hips
- wall push ups
- ball bridge (feet on ball or back on ball, +/- single leg lift)
- arm and leg lift on all fours
- leg lift sitting on the ball
- shoulder rotations with back on the ball
- standing balance work on the bosu or balance disc

Please note: while these exercises are pelvic floor friendly, you will also need to consider the number of repetitions, intensity, number of sets, length of rest, activation of your pelvic floor muscle and your fatigue level – which also affects your pelvic floor function.

Core exercises to avoid

- sit ups, curl ups, crunches
- abdominal exercises with medicine ball
- V-sit
- hundreds
- double leg lowers
- plank position on hands and feet (eg 'hovers', full push ups)

Modifying exercise programs

Things to consider when modifying an exercise program

Examples of these exercises include:

Core

- Abdominal exercises (e.g. sit ups, curl ups, crunches, double leg lifts, exercises on machines)
- Any weighted rotation exercises (e.g. Seated medicine ball twists, suspended torso rotations, rotating planks)

- Planks on toes and variations of this (e.g. planks with feet on ball or in suspension straps, planks on hands and toes and moving to elbows)

Resistance

- Weight training for both upper and lower body where the load is heavier than 50% 1RM
- Long stride and/or deep lunges in any direction
- Wide leg and deep squats
- Exercises with both feet off the floor unassisted (e.g. tricep dips and chin ups)
- Body weight training when using the full body weight (e.g. push-ups on toes)

Exercises that place downward force or pressure on the pelvic floor can also stress the pelvic floor. Examples of these exercises include:

- Running, including running down stairs
- Jumping, including box jumps
- Skipping rope
- Boxing (with bag contact)
- High impact exercise classes
- HIIT workouts
- Sporting drills

Kegels

Kegels are a great way to train your pelvic muscle by contracting and relaxing your pelvic floor. To perform this exercise, you must:

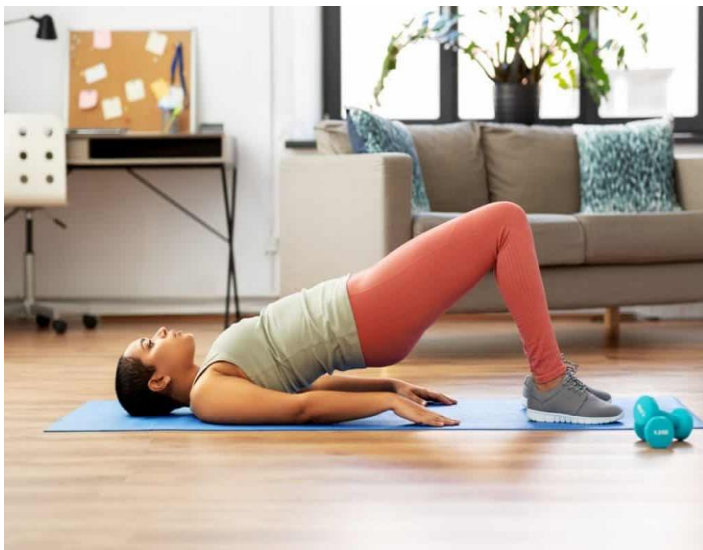
1. Position yourself comfortably, whether you are sitting or standing. Be sure to maintain the normal inward curve of your lower spine.
2. Identify and activate your pelvic floor muscles with a lift and squeeze motion, breathing normally throughout.
3. Attempt to perform the lift and squeeze motion up for up to 10 seconds.
4. Completely relax your pelvic muscles before another set.

This exercise may be repeated up to 12 repetitions in a row to complete a full set. Three sets throughout the day are the goal.

Bridge

While most may think the bridge is a great exercise for your glutes, it can also help strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. For this workout, you will:

1. Lie on the floor with your back flat against the ground and your knees bent at a 90-degree angle. Your feet should be flat on the floor with your arms at your side, palms facing down.
2. Pushing through your heels, raise your hips off the ground by squeezing your glutes, pelvic floor, and hamstrings.
3. Pause for a few seconds and return to the first position.



Bird dog

The bird dog move helps to engage many muscle groups throughout your body, including your pelvic floor. To complete this exercise, you can:

1. Get on your hands and knees, position your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. Ensure your back is as straight as possible.
2. Brace your core muscles and draw your shoulder blades back down toward your hips.
3. At the same time, straighten and lift your left leg and right arm, keeping the rest of your body in a neutral position. Hold for a few seconds.
4. Lower your arm and leg back down to their original position. Repeat the move with the opposite extremities.



Seated Breathing



KARLY TREACY

It may sound simple, but finding a comfortable seat and breathing deeply into your side ribs can encourage the diaphragm and pelvic floor muscles to stretch, Treacy says.

How to do seated breathing: As you inhale, visualize the gills of a fish and how they expand out to the sides as they draw their breath in. When you do this, the diaphragm and the pelvic floor are stretching. As you exhale completely, feel the ribs come back to center and the pelvic floor subtly lift. Continue for eight to 10 breaths.

Runner's Lunge



KARLY TREACY

This stretch lengthens all of the muscles in the front of the back leg, all the way up into the deep muscles of the low belly that reside in the pelvic bowl.

How to do a runner's lunge: Step one foot forward stacking that knee over the ankle and let the back knee rest on the ground. With two hands, frame your front foot. If your hands don't easily make it to the ground, place them on two yoga blocks standing on their longest sides. If you don't have yoga blocks, you can stack books on top of each other until you reach a height that feels comfortable.

Let your hips shift forward to open up the front of the back leg's thigh. Make sure that your front knee is directly over the ankle. Hold for 12 to 15 deep breaths.

Side Lunges



KARLY TREACY

A side lunge opens the inner thighs, which helps lengthen the pelvic floor.

How to do side lunges: Stand with your feet about a leg's length apart. Maintaining the connection of both heels to the floor, bend into one knee. Bring your hands to the ground or to yoga blocks. Keep the other leg straight and externally rotate the straight leg from deep in the hip socket, so that the toes point to the ceiling. Hold for eight breaths, and then switch sides and repeat once more per side.

Supported Pigeon



KARLY TREACY

This restorative yoga pose will stretch and lengthen the outer hip muscles that surround the pelvis

How to do supported pigeon: Place the front leg shin just in front of the bolster. The back leg extends straight back from the hip with the inner thigh rolling up toward the ceiling. Fold over your front leg as deeply as your body will comfortably allow, making sure you can relax and soften here.

If this is too much of a stretch, prop your torso and head on another bolster or stack of blankets. “If you can’t relax in this pose, the muscles will continue to grip and you won’t be doing anything to help your pelvic floor muscles,” Treacy says. Hold this stretch for 10 to 15 breaths, then switch sides.

Deep squat



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In addition to strengthening the glutes, core, quads, and hamstrings, squats also give the pelvic floor a boost—especially when paired with kegels and specific breathing techniques.

How to do a deep squat: Stand with your feet a little wider than hips width apart and toes pointing forward or slightly outwards. Bend your knees and lower to a squat, as if you're trying to tap your butt to an imaginary chair. During the squat, inhale on your way down, then exhale and contract your pelvic floor for a kegel on the way back up.