

Exercises to Strengthen and Relax Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles play a large role in supporting the organs in the pelvis, including the bladder, intestines, and uterus. Learning to properly control and strengthen these muscles can improve bladder and bowel function, reduce the risk of pelvic organ prolapse, and enhance sexual function. However, it's equally important to learn how to relax these muscles, as excessive tension can lead to issues such as chronic pelvic pain and difficulty in urination or bowel movements. Here, we explore exercises aimed at both strengthening and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles.



Strengthening Exercises

1. Kegel Exercises

Kegels are the most well-known exercises for strengthening the pelvic floor. To perform a Kegel:

- Identify your pelvic floor muscles by trying to stop your urine flow mid-stream. The muscles you use are your target.
- Once identified, contract these muscles for 3-5 seconds, then relax for 3-5 seconds.
- If it is difficult to isolate these muscles, having a small squishy ball or firm pillow lightly squeezed between the knees can provide extra muscle recruitment to build the foundation for this skill
- Repeat 10-15 times per session, and aim for three sessions per day.

2. Bridges

Bridges strengthen not only your pelvic floor but also your buttocks and lower back.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Exhaling on the way up, engage your pelvic floor muscles, then slowly lift your hips towards the ceiling.
- Hold this position for a few seconds before slowly lowering your hips back to the floor, inhaling on the way down.
- Perform 10-15 repetitions.

3. Squats

Squats engage the pelvic floor muscles and the larger muscles of the legs and buttocks.

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
- Lower your body and bring your hips back as if sitting back into a chair, keeping your knees over your ankles. If trying this exercise for the first time, just barely touching your bottom to a study chair as you lower can give nice cues for proper mechanics.
- Press through your heels to return to the starting position.
- Aim for 10-15 repetitions.



Relaxation Exercises

1. Pelvic Floor Drops

Pelvic floor drops help counteract the tension in the pelvic floor muscles.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- Take a deep breath in, consciously relaxing and releasing the pelvic floor muscles. Feel the pelvic floor gently expand as you breathe in, rather than bearing down.
- Repeat 5-10 reps x 3 per day.

2. Diaphragmatic Breathing

Deep breathing exercises encourage relaxation throughout the body, including the pelvic floor.

- Lie on your back or sit comfortably, placing one hand on your chest and the other on your lower abdomen.
- Breathe in deeply through your nose, allowing your abdomen to rise more than your chest both up and out towards the sides of the torso.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, feeling the abdomen fall.
- Continue for 5-10 minutes, focusing on relaxing your pelvic floor muscles with each exhale.

3. Happy Baby Pose

This yoga pose can help stretch and relax the pelvic floor muscles.

- Lie on your back and bring your knees towards your chest.
- Grab the outer edges of your feet/shin/behind your knees with your hands, opening your knees wider than your torso.

- Gently pull your knees towards the ground, keeping your back on the floor.
- Hold for 30 seconds to a minute, breathing deeply and focusing on relaxing the pelvic floor.

More relaxation exercises are featured in our video:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C31DIH6voiUU1ArS18fzxYnOhJswq1iCefqQGw0/?igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==>

Conclusion

Maintaining a balance between strengthening and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles is essential for pelvic health. Regularly incorporating these exercises into your routine can help enhance your pelvic floor function. However, if you experience any pain or discomfort while performing these exercises, it's advisable to consult with a healthcare provider or a pelvic floor physiotherapist for personalized advice and guidance.