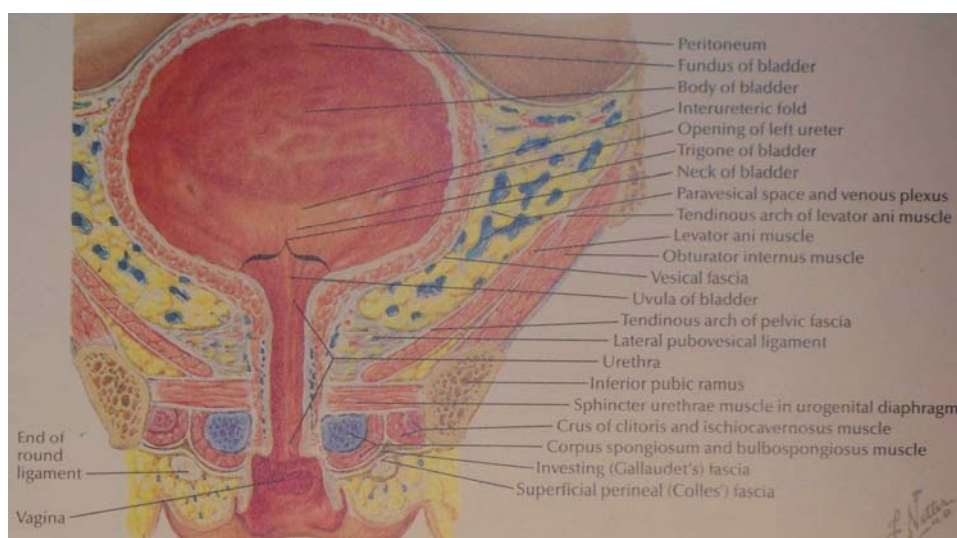
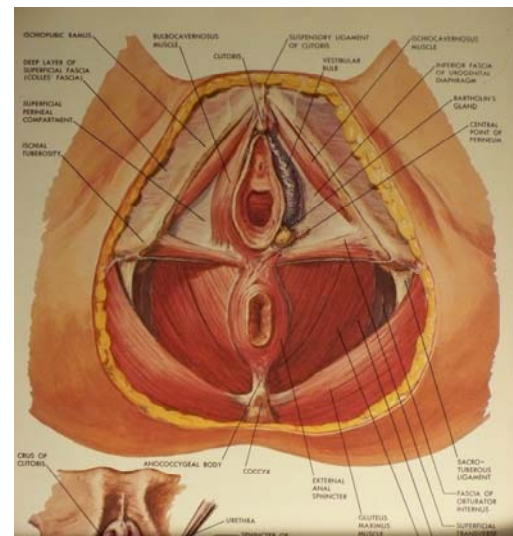
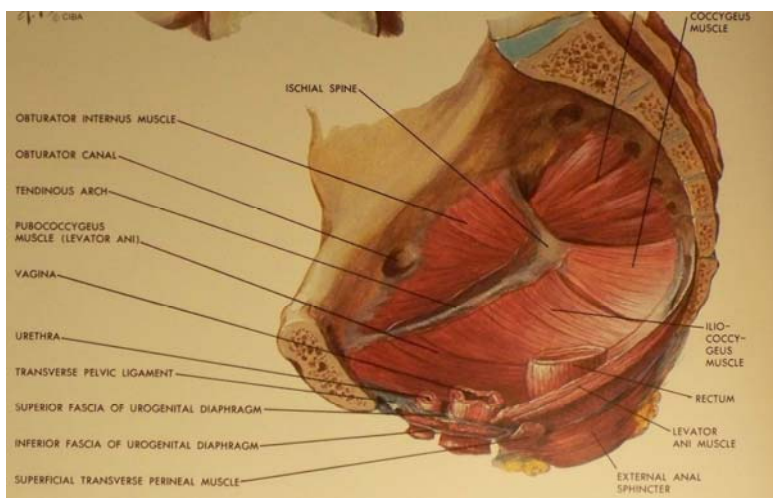


## KEGEL (PELVIC MUSCLE) EXERCISES

The pelvic muscles are an important part of the mechanism that maintains control of both urine and stool. These muscles commonly weaken with age and with childbearing either causing or contributing to incontinence.

The pelvic muscles, like any other muscle in the body, can be strengthened with regular exercise and when strengthened can decrease and sometimes eliminate uncontrolled loss of urine and stool. Like all muscles that are exercised, pelvic muscle strengthening requires time, progressive increase in intensity of exercise and long-term commitment. Also, like other muscle groups, trying to do too much too soon may create overuse injury and muscle fatigue.

The pelvic muscles and their association with the bladder outlet (urethra) are shown in the figures below. Stronger pelvic muscles increase both baseline and peak closure pressures on the bladder outlet. Because these muscles rarely have conscious use, intentional contraction may initially be very subtle and, when beginning, tightening the wrong muscle groups such as the buttocks, abdomen and thigh muscles is common.



When first starting, lay on your bed with your back and head slightly elevated. Empty your bladder before beginning and wear loose clothing. First tighten and relax your fist and concentrate on the difference in feeling. These will be the same sensations in the pelvic muscles when they are tightened and relaxed.

When first identifying the correct muscles place two fingers in your vagina. You should feel a squeezing sensation when the correct muscles are contracted. These are the same muscles used to stop your urine stream when sitting on the toilet. Another way to visualize the correct muscles is to imagine that you are attempting to lift a marble or grape with your vagina.

Begin slowly and build gradually to avoid muscle fatigue. Ten 10 second contractions with thirty seconds of relaxation between contractions is a good starting point however some women's muscles are so weak that they cannot hold a contraction for more than a few seconds.

If you are unable to maintain the contraction for more than a few seconds do not try quickly relaxing and resuming the muscle contraction. Instead count this as one of the ten contractions and relax thirty seconds before the next contraction.

Begin with ten contractions two times each day. Once you can hold all ten contractions comfortably for ten seconds, increase to fifteen contractions and then gradually build to thirty contractions two to three times each day. To be effective your Kegel exercises should be done every day. However, as you progress and become more skilled, Kegel exercises do not have to be done in bed but may be done anytime and in any location.

Strengthened pelvic muscles may be used for reducing loss of urine with stresses such as cough, sneeze and laugh and for the urine loss that occurs with a strong urge. With a strong urge rushing to the bathroom often worsens the leak by placing increased abdominal pressure on the bladder.

Instead of rushing, sit calmly and do three rapid one to two second pelvic muscle contractions. This will usually break the bladder spasm and allow time for you to rise slowly and then calmly walk to the bathroom.

Remember, like other aspects of good health, effective pelvic muscle exercises require a lifelong commitment. As John Irving said in "Hotel New Hampshire" you have to get obsessed and stay obsessed. Good luck.

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