



The Canadian
Continence
Foundation

The CANADIAN CONTINENCE FOUNDATION

15th EDITION

December 1997

Informer

New Name, Same Commitment

Welcome to the new Informer, introduced to you along with the new name and logo for the Foundation. There is a critical need for a Canadian organization which can work across this country to meet the needs of those experiencing incontinence, and which can combine the forces and expertise of the individual who experiences the problem, health professionals who work in the area, and the public and private sectors. To effectively and publicly communicate this stance the Simon Foundation for Continence Canada has adopted a new name, **The Canadian Continence Foundation.**

The content of this "new look" newsletter continues to be driven by your letters and calls. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any comments, questions, or topics you would like us to address!

Our special thanks go to Autumn Trumbull, RN, for her help in coordinating this edition of The Informer.

Symbol of hope



This new logo for **The Canadian Continence Foundation** is intended to be, above all, a symbol of hope for those who experience incontinence.

It has been formed from two graphic elements. The first is a letter C, the first letter of the word "continence", which has been rotated backward to form a "container", and which may also be seen as the top of a candle. The second is a "drop" shape which, because of its brush drawn form, resembles a flame.

Just as the candle has traditionally been seen as a source of warmth, guidance and hope so the Canadian Continence Foundation functions to support, assist and offer hope to those who experience incontinence and to their caregivers.

The 5 W's of Pelvic Muscle (Kegel) Exercises

Many of you have contacted us over the years with questions about pelvic muscle exercises. Should I be doing them? How do I know I am doing them properly? Is there a set way to do them? How long should I hold the contraction? How many contractions do I have to do every day? What is biofeedback?

This article was written, thanks to Claudia Brown, Physiotherapist, Polyclinique Cabrini, Montreal, Quebec, to help clarify some of your questions and to complement the Kegel instruction sheet already available through The Canadian Continence Foundation.

Who is a candidate for pelvic muscle (pelvic floor) exercises?

Do you have trouble with urine leakage when you cough, laugh or sneeze? Are you constantly returning to the washroom to empty your bladder, sometimes urgently, and sometimes "just in case"? Do you have to wear pads during certain activities? Have you discontinued any sports in order to avoid uncontrolled urine loss? If you have answered yes to any of these questions, you may be a candidate for pelvic floor exercises. While pelvic floor exercises may be helpful for anyone when done properly, whether or not they can help your particular situation is a matter for discussion with a healthcare professional who is interested and knowledgeable in this area.

Continued on page 2

Inside Information

Diabetes and Bladder Control	p. 2
Incontinence Awareness Month	p. 5
Partners in Continence Conference Report	p. 5
Literature & Resource Review	p. 6
Noteworthy	p. 7
Order Form	p. 8

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Q. Can diabetes have an impact on bladder control?

A. Yes. The greatest effect of diabetes on bladder control is related to the nerve changes which occur (called diabetic neuropathies).

Diabetic neuropathy can result in weakness of the bladder muscle. This weakness leaves the bladder unable to produce a contraction strong enough to push the urine out. Urine can then build up in the bladder. This is called **residual urine**. Sensation of the bladder filling may also be affected by the neuropathy. If the sensation is present then **frequency** (feeling the need to go frequently to the bathroom) is common. If sensation is not present, considerable amounts of urine can build up and **overflow incontinence** (the frequent leakage of urine without the urge to urinate) results. If diabetes is not well controlled, you may experience excessive thirst. This means that the bladder will have to deal with a larger amount of urine production. In

You Asked Us
In addition sugar in the urine increases the risk for urinary infections which may put you at greater risk for incontinence. Sometimes, people with diabetes may have a hyperactive or sensitive bladder. Sudden strong urges to urinate resulting in difficulty getting to the bathroom on time can result. Frequency also often occurs along with this.

Since diabetic neuropathies are most often associated with long term and/or poorly controlled diabetes, maintaining good control of the blood sugar is your best defense against bladder complications. This is best achieved through a proper diet and medical evaluation and management. This will also be helpful in the elimination of sugar in the urine. Monitoring of your blood sugar at home with a glucometer can greatly increase your success.

If you have residual urine in the bladder, a plan of **intermittent catheterization** may be helpful. This involves using a thin tube a few times a day to empty the bladder.

Autumn Trumbull, RN, St. Joseph's Health Center, Toronto

The Five W's of

What are the pelvic floor muscles?

The pelvic floor muscles are located at the undersurface of the pelvis, and are named this way because they actually do form the floor of the pelvis. From the side view, the pelvic floor can be likened to a hammock, or the bottom and sides of a bowl, and from the front view it can be described as being in the shape of the lower half of a bucket. The main part of the muscle starts from the inside of the pelvis, attaches to the pubic bone in front and to the end of the spinal column in the back, and joins together at and around the anus (see diagram A).

Why should I do pelvic floor exercises?

Pelvic floor exercises, often referred to as Kegel exercises, help to improve the strength, awareness and control of the pelvic floor muscles. They are important because the pelvic muscles serve to help support the bladder and to help close the urethra (the passageway leading to outside the body). A good pelvic muscle contraction can therefore help to prevent urine leakage during activities that put pressure on the bladder. In addition, a message will be sent to the bladder during the contraction to help decrease feelings of urgency (the sudden need to urinate immediately).

How can I do pelvic floor exercises properly?

At first, a pelvic muscle contraction will demand some degree of thought and concentration, since the movement required is not always obvious. In fact, it would be helpful for you if your healthcare professional could work with you and teach you how to do the exercises properly. To locate the muscle, think of the type of effort that would be necessary in trying to hold in sudden passing of gas, or in trying to stop the flow of urine. Visualize the public bone in front and the coccyx in back, and squeeze as if to bring the pubic bone down toward the coccyx. Then imagine purse strings at the openings of the vagina and rectum, and squeeze to close tightly. Hold the contraction for five to ten seconds, let go, and then wait ten seconds before repeating. While it is better to do these exercises while you are not urinating, you may find it easier to locate the muscles the first few times by using them to stop the flow of urine.

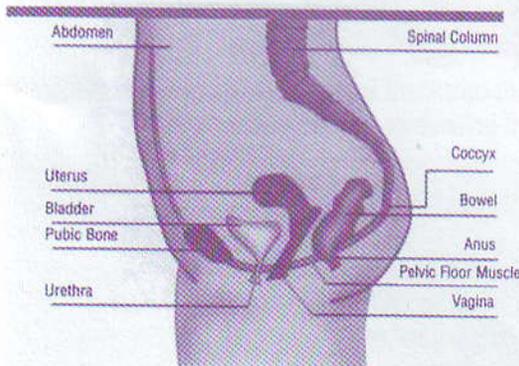
Kegel exercises help to improve the strength, awareness and control of the pelvic muscles.

Pelvic Muscle (Kegel) Exercises continued from page 1

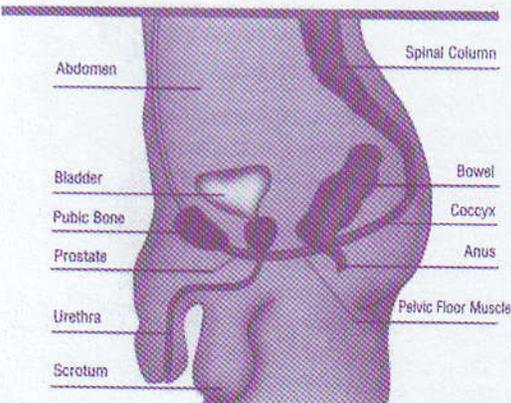
If you look at the pelvic floor with a mirror while contracting properly, you should see the anus (the part of the body you use to hold back bowel movements and passing gas) move inward and upward. Women may feel the muscle bands squeeze together by doing the contraction with one or two fingers placed at least two inches inside the vagina. Men will notice the penis contract inward. It is important to eliminate the use of other muscle groups in attempting a pelvic floor contraction. This is why it is a good idea to practice the exercise while lying down on your back, with the hips and knees bent and the feet flat on the floor. The contraction should be of low to moderate strength, as other muscles often come into play when a very strong contraction is attempted.

As you get used to performing the contraction without contracting other muscles at the same time (like the abdominal and buttock muscles), stronger contractions can be done. There should be no detectable movement of the legs, buttocks or abdomen during a good pelvic floor contraction. As you become an expert, you should be able to perform the exercise with ease sitting and standing as well. For short point-by-point instructions on Kegel exercises to keep handy,

you may order the Pelvic Muscle Exercise Fact Sheet from The Canadian Continence Foundation (see back page of this newsletter for order form).



Side view - female



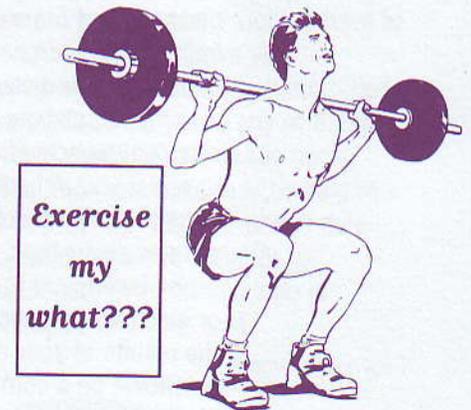
Side view - male

Diagram A

When and Where should I practice my pelvic muscle exercises?

Once you have mastered the contraction, set up an exercise program that is right for you. Do strong contractions for five to ten seconds at a time to build up resistance for sneezing and coughing. Practice holding a low-strength contraction for progressively longer periods to train for endurance during those situations when you feel an urgent need to urinate. Try to do up to ten rapid contractions within a ten-second period to be sure you can quickly call upon those muscles at a moment's notice! This will help you to train for optimum help in various situations. It is a good idea to contract the pelvic floor many times per day. You can break the contractions up into three to five sessions of twelve to twenty contractions or up to ten sessions of ten contractions per day. The key is to do many contractions so that you train the pelvic floor to be ready to work for you in different situations. Motivation is very important, and it is usually much more difficult to remember to do the exercises than it is to actually do them!

The beauty of pelvic floor exercises is that they can be done in any place and at any time, they do not require equipment, preparation, or fancy gym shorts, and, if done fully clothed, no one will notice a thing! Contract the pelvic floor regularly throughout the day, until it becomes as automatic as adjusting your posture or taking a deep breath. And, most important of all, if you get good results, don't stop! In addition to your daily exercise routine, use the contraction during your normal activities. That is, squeeze before and during a cough or sneeze, lift the pelvic floor as you lift that bag of groceries, and give your contraction a surge to purge the urge!



Continued on page 4



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The Five W's of Pelvic Muscle Exercises

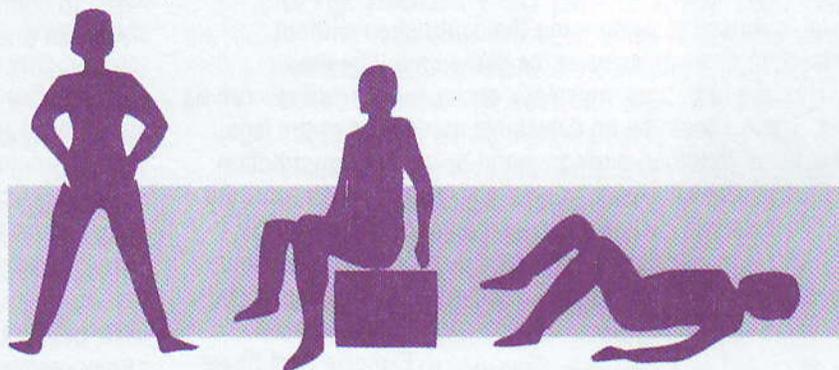
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When should I see results?

While some people experience better bladder control within the first few weeks of their exercise program, it may take others more than one month to begin to see results. If results are slow in coming for you, or if you are not sure that you have really mastered the pelvic floor contraction, consult your healthcare professional. After determining whether or not pelvic floor exercises are right for you, an interested and experienced healthcare professional can help you to perfect your contraction and to progress your training program properly. This may be done through demonstration, stretching, massage and pressure techniques, and/or biofeedback and electrical muscle stimulation. Biofeedback and electrical muscle stimulation are designed to assist you in finding and controlling the correct pelvic muscles, and to track your progress over time. With the use of a probe inserted in to the vagina or rectum, or electrodes placed on the skin surface, the results of your muscle contraction can be shown on a computer screen. An electrical current can be used to help you feel the muscles contract. Some physicians, nurses and physiotherapists working in incontinence have machines in their clinic, or may be able to refer you to someone who does. You may have to pay for the sessions, and your healthcare professional will be able to tell you whether or not the sessions are covered under your provincial or private insurance health plans.

The Bottom Line

You can think of your training as you would think of training to play golf – you may take many lessons from many different Pros, and hear various tips and much advice, but, ultimately, you will find the swing that is right for you to enable yourself to play the game at your best. The more comfortable you are with your program, the more likely it is that you will do it often and with success.



Just remember:

- Consult an interested and experienced healthcare professional who can evaluate your condition and identify whether or not you are a candidate for these exercises.
- Ask your healthcare professional to teach you how to do the exercises properly.