The Pelvic Floor Muscles

What are the pelvic floor muscles?
The pelvic floor muscles are formed by several layers of muscles that make up the floor of the pelvis. They act like a hammock that travels from the front of the pelvis to the tailbone and provide several key functions.

1. Supporting the abdomino-pelvic contents (Bladder, Uterus, Rectum)
2. To aid in the stopping and starting of urine, stool and gas through sphincter control
3. To aid in sexual function

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Practice finding your pelvic floor muscles
Imagine you are trying to stop your urine flow or hold back gas by contracting your pelvic floor muscles. These exercises are also referred to as Kegels. If you are performing them correctly, you should feel an “inward and upward” motion by your rectum and vaginal opening. Be sure not to squeeze any of the larger surrounding muscles such as your buttocks, thighs, or abdominals. Women can identify the muscles by inserting 1 or 2 fingers at the opening of the vagina and feel the muscles contract and lift. Men can place a finger by the outside of the anus and feel the same “up and in” motion of the muscles. You can also use a mirror to view the outside of the vagina and rectum and see the motion of the muscles “lift and squeeze.” If you see a bulge or movement outwards then you are performing the contraction incorrectly. Contact a health care professional (PT or OT) for more specific instruction.

Another way to see if you are performing the exercise correctly is the Urine Stop Test—REMEMBER THIS IS NOT THE WAY TO EXERCISE BUT A WAY TO IDENTIFY THE MUSCLES. While on the toilet, try to stop your urine flow midstream. If your muscles are strong, you will be able to stop your urine flow immediately.

Practice Training Your Pelvic Floor
The pelvic floor is made up of two types of fibers: 70% in charge of endurance and 30% for power to stop leakage against coughing or sneezing. This is why you should practice both quick contractions and long holds to address both types of muscle fibers. Also remember that to get the full function of the muscle, you need to relax them completely between each repetition.

You can begin starting the exercises by laying on your back and then progress to sitting and standing.
Quick Flicks
Practice contracting the pelvic floor quickly holding for about 2 seconds, then completely relax the muscles. You should feel that same “Up and in” motion by the vaginal opening and rectum without using your buttocks or abdominals. You can begin by repeating this 10 times per set and doing this 2-3 times throughout the day. Another way to practice these is to kegel prior to coughing or sneezing to help control any leakage. REMEMBER QUALITY OVER QUANTITY WITH THIS EXERCISE!

Long Holds
Another goal is to be able to contract and hold the pelvic floor muscles for several seconds without using any of the larger surrounding muscles. Without holding your breath, try to kegel and maintain the contraction for up to 5 seconds. Completely relax between contractions and then repeat up to 10 times. Once this is easy to do, you can increase the time held to 7 seconds, then 10 seconds. Goal should be to perform 1-3 sets of 10, 10 second holds. REMEMBER QUALITY OVER QUANTITY WITH THIS EXERCISE!