KEGEL EXERCISES

Pelvic floor exercises, also called Kegel (kay-gull) exercises after Dr. Arnold Kegel who developed them, strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles play a role in supporting the bladder ad urethra. Weak pelvic floor muscles may contribute to incontinence. Exercises to strengthen theses muscles may help improve urine control.

How Kegel Exercises Help
The pelvic floor muscles act as a sling to help hold the bladder and urethra in place. These muscles also help keep the urethra closed. Weak pelvic floor muscles may allow urine to leak. To strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, do Kegel exercises daily. In a few months, the muscles will be stronger and tighter. This can help prevent urine leakage.

How to do Kegels
Kegel exercises are simple to do and can be done almost anywhere. When you do Kegels, try not to move your leg, buttock, or stomach muscles.

To learn which muscles to exercise:

- While you are urinating, try to stop or slow the urine without tensing the muscles of your legs, buttocks, or abdomen. It is very important *not* to use these other muscles, because only the pelvic floor muscles help with bladder control.
- When you are able to slow or stop the stream of urine, you have located the correct muscles. Feel the sensation of the muscles pulling inward and upward.

Tip: Squeeze in the rectal area to tighten the anus as if trying not to pass gas. Once you have found the right muscles, do NOT interrupt your urine flow.

Now you are ready to exercise regularly:

- When you have located the correct muscles, set aside three to four times each day to exercising: morning, midday, and evening.
- Squeeze your muscles to the slow count of four. Then, relax these muscles completely to the slow count of four. (This four-second contraction and four-second relaxation make one "set").
- Complete 10 sets during each of your daily exercise sessions.

Make pelvic floor exercises a part of your routine:

- Whether you are doing pelvic muscle exercises to improve or maintain bladder control, you must do them regularly on a lifetime basis.
- Use the daily routines such as watching TV, reading, stopping at traffic lights, and waiting in the grocery checkout line as cues to perform a few exercises.

Helpful Tips:

- If your pelvic floor muscles are very weak, you should begin by contracting the muscles for only 3 to 5 seconds. Do the best you can and continue faithfully. In a few weeks, you should be able

to exercise sets you are able to do. Your goal is to hold each contraction for 10 seconds, to relax for 10 seconds, and to complete 25 to 30 sets.

- In the beginning, check yourself frequently by looking in the mirror or by placing a hand on your abdomen and buttocks to ensure that you do not feel your belly, thigh, or buttock muscles move. If there is movement, continue to experiment until you have isolated just the muscles of the pelvic floor.
- Your bladder control should begin to improve in 3 to 4 weeks. If you keep a record of urine leakage each day, you should begin to notice fewer marks in the bladder leakage column.
- Some patients with urgency incontinence will benefit from an additional maneuver. With the onset of urgency, cross the legs, and squeeze the muscles quickly, rather than long holds, until the sensation resolves. Then, go to the bathroom.

Other Helpful Hints:

- Make the toilet facilities convenient; this may mean a bedside commode or a bedpan or a urinal placed in the bed.
- Wear clothes that are easy to remove.
- Train your bladder. Avoid frequent trips to the bladder 'just in case."
- Remain on the toilet until you feel your bladder is empty. If you feel there is still some urine in the bladder, stand up, sit back down, and lean forward slightly over the knees.
- Empty your bladder before you start on a trip of an hour or more. Don't try to wait until you get home or until it's more convenient.
- Learn to squeeze before you sneeze, cough, laugh, get out of chair, or pick up something heavy.
- Establish regular bowel habits. Constipation affects bladder control.
- Avoid foods that are known to affect the bladder, such as tomatoes, chocolate, spicy foods, and beverages such as alcohol and those that contain caffeine.
- Watch your weight. Obesity makes bladder control more difficulty.
- Stop smoking. Smoking is irritating to the bladder, and a smoker's cough may cause bladder leakage.