



Exercising Your Way to Better Health

Having babies takes its toll on the body as do surgery and the constant unrelenting magnetic pull of gravity. As over 5.5 percent of all women are aware, once elasticity in the pelvic area is lost, a great many more problems than a flabby stomach are apt to occur. Embarrassment causes a majority to keep problems of prolapsed organs, bladder difficulties, abdominal discomfort, cystoceles, urinary stress incontinence (which can be caused by nothing more noteworthy than a cough or sneeze) to themselves, only seeking out medical attention when the problem becomes too severe. But statistics can speak for themselves. The problems are more common than any of us expected. One solution, where there was thought to be none, is to strengthen the pelvic region with daily exercise.

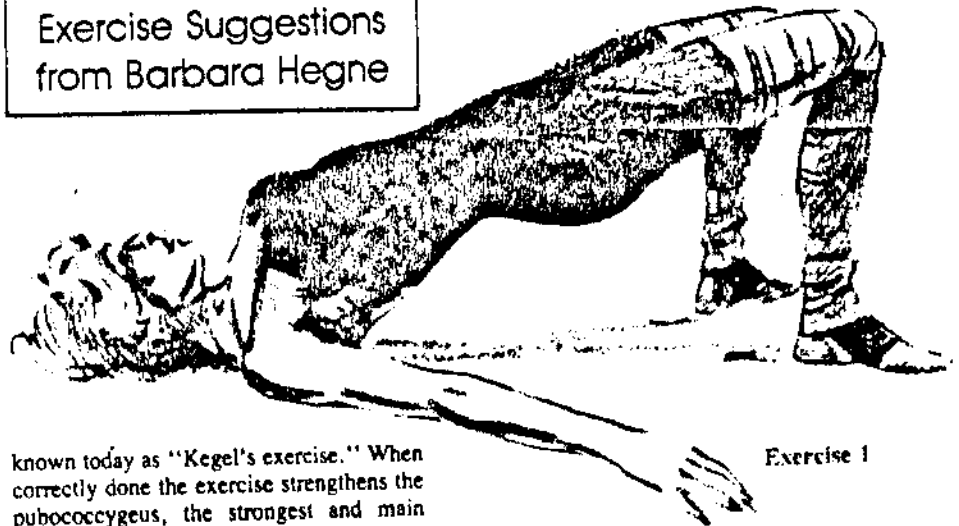
In the past a woman with urinary stress incontinence (USI), the technical name for uncontrollable dribbling or short expulsion of urine, had an option of surgery or living with the discomfort. Any treatment between the two extremes was virtually nonexistent; a telltale sign of the lack of information available to the medical profession.

This gradually changed as Dr. Arnold H. Kegel, a pioneering California physician, began researching the subject and setting up his own experiments. His studies included women of childbearing and menopausal age, virgins, women who had never given birth or who had done so only by Caesarian section. Over the years he discovered that approximately one-third of all women who had given birth naturally suffered a certain percentage of weak pelvic muscles and in turn developed genital relaxation. Despite nature's own healing process, he found that after giving birth the organs never returned to their original integrity of form and function.

Tests followed on 3000 sexually inactive, childless or Caesarian-section women. Surprisingly the results revealed a degree of genital relaxation and the same ensuing problems. Dr. Kegel concluded that the majority of feminine problems in this area stem from weak, injured or inactive muscles of the birth canal, and a lack of knowledge on how to exercise and strengthen these particular muscles.

In 1930 Dr. Kegel devised an exercise

Feminine Isometric Exercise Suggestions from Barbara Hegne



Exercise 1

known today as "Kegel's exercise." When correctly done the exercise strengthens the pubococcygeus, the strongest and main muscle of the pelvic area. The pubococcygeus (pronounced pu-bo-cocks-uh-gee-us) resembles a suspended muscular sling located between the pubic and tailbone. The urethra, vagina and rectum pass through this muscle which aids in the normal functioning of bladder and bowel. When attempting to restore tone and tighten the pelvic floor, this is the muscle to exercise.

At a general hospital in western New York, a group of women with USI, aging from forty to sixty, tested out Kegel's exercise theory. After the exercises were performed over a three week period, a noticeable decrease in symptoms and discomfort was reported. Since then doctors and nurses have had a safe and effective alternative to suggest for women who have come for help.

***Note:** This study represents only mild to moderate cases of USI. Every woman should first check with her doctor before attempting a self-diagnosis or suggested treatment. Your doctor can determine whether your particular condition requires additional medical attention.

How to locate the pubococcygeus

Exercising the pubococcygeus may be slightly tricky if you are not aware of the correct muscle and where it is located. Don't try too hard. You may become con-

fused and tighten the wrong muscle. Many women make the mistake of bearing down while holding their breath and pulling in on the abdominal or inner thigh muscles. This can cause a feeling of fatigue and dizziness and could add to the existing muscle problem.

Try locating the P.C. muscle by doing the following tests. Pretend you are on a trip and have to empty your bladder but are ten miles from the nearest restroom. You instinctively contract the muscle that will prevent any leakage of urine. Or suppose you are forced to hold back a bowel movement for that same ten miles; again you naturally tighten a set of inner mus-

cles. Both these sets of muscles involve the pubococcygeus.

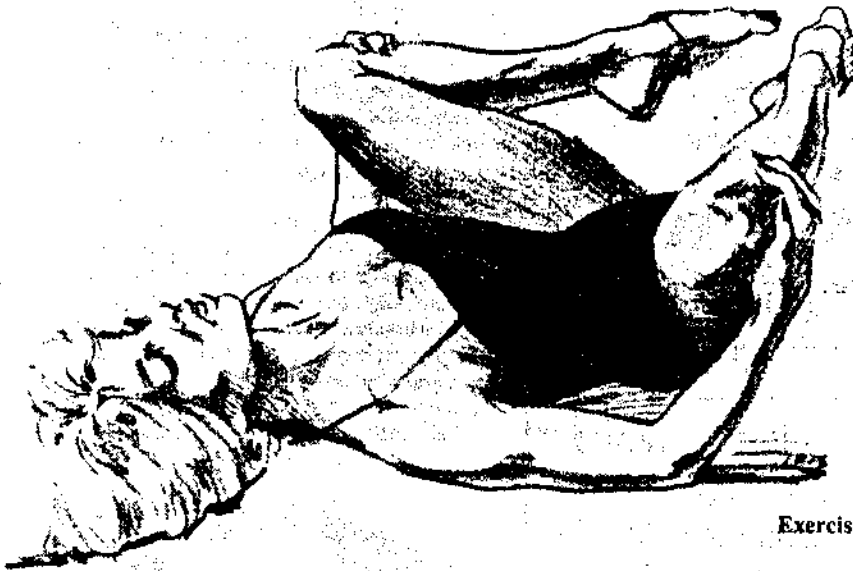
If you have difficulty with this approach, next time you go to the bathroom spread your legs wide apart and alternately stop and start the flow of urine. Your ability to stop or your failure to not stop the flow is a good indication of the strength of your pubococcygeus. If, after these tests you still do not feel you can locate the P.C. insert one finger into your vagina and contract the muscles manually. Feel the muscle wall tighten around your finger. By learning to control this major muscle, you will be helping to minimize sagging organs and will provide a better support system for the vaginal canal and entire body.

Silent internal contractions

Now that you have discovered how to contract and strengthen the P.C. muscle you are ready for daily exercise suggestions. Since the degree of this problem varies from woman to woman expect the time span for results to vary. With continuous practice of the following contraction exercises some results should be apparent within a few weeks. The secret however lies in the amount of effort applied, the amount of time spent exercising and the continuity of the program. These outwardly motion-

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Exercise 2

less exercises can be done at home, on the job, in the car, while shopping or waiting for an elevator. No one but yourself will be able to tell how you are making use of these spare moments.

Contraction #1

Stand with your feet at least shoulder width apart. Action: Tighten the internal P.C. muscle and hold the contracted muscle for a count of ten. Repeat several times.

Contraction #2

Do this exercise at the table or while riding in your car. Sit with your spine straight and your feet uncrossed. Squeeze the internal muscles rapidly twenty times.

Contraction #3

You may do this isometric contraction either standing, sitting or lying down. Tighten and relax the P.C. muscle alternately to a fast, then slow hold count. Count one squeeze, two squeeze, three squeeze, then hold the muscle tight for 4 counts. Relax and repeat several times a day.

Contraction #4

The first thing in the morning is a great time to do slow muscle contractions. Squeeze your P.C. muscle tightly and hold for twenty counts, relax and repeat 10 times.

Feel free to practice your silent contractions day or night. Try a 3-week session of regimented program contracting. Begin squeezing and holding a few minutes a day adding more time to each contraction. Work up gradually until you are actually contracting and releasing for twenty minutes at a time.

Sex-a-bility body exercises

This section of exercises is of major importance in making the body flexible, supple and strong. Proper leg, thigh and pelvic stretches will add power to your entire body. Don't be discouraged if you cannot do all the exercises at first. Gradually your

body will improve and strengthen with daily practice.

Exercise #1

Lie on your back and bend your knees. Action: Slowly lift your pelvis up toward the ceiling. Push and arch as high as possible. Tighten your P.C. muscle five times. Lower down and repeat ten times. This exercise will help keep your hips and mid-section flexible and give strength to your legs.

Exercise #2

Here is a great exercise for the inner thigh area. Without proper stretch these muscles have a tendency to shorten. Keep them flexible by doing the following exercise everyday. Lie on your back, bend your knees and touch the bottoms of your feet together. Let your legs relax. Action: Grab your inner knees and gently pull them wide apart. Then pull them up toward your chest as you continue to keep the legs apart and toes touching. Relax and repeat five times.

Exercise #3

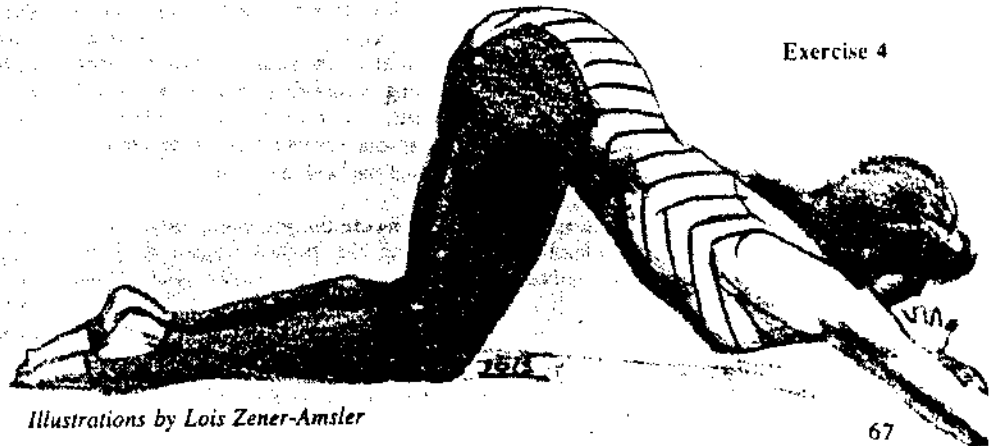
The next exercise tones the buttocks, inner thighs and P.C. muscle all through one powerful isometric effort. Position: Get down on your knees on a soft surface, be sure your knees are wide apart. Place your hands on your hips and keep your back straight. Action: Tighten your buttocks and internal muscles and attempt to draw your knees together. Hold this tensed position for a count of ten. Release and repeat 3 times.

Exercise #4

Here is a great exercise that affects more than one area of the body. The position helps give the female organs a mini uplift. Some doctors recommend the position to help relieve menstrual distress and female cramps. Let gravity help in the powerful uplifting of the organs. Position: Get down on all fours on a soft surface. Slowly slide your arms out in front of your body and press your chin and chest to the floor. Hold this position with the abdominal muscles relaxed for about 10 seconds to allow the female organs to gently lift to their natural positions. Now pull the stomach in tight and tighten the buttocks at the same time. Hold for ten counts, relax and release.



Exercise 3



Exercise 4