

Two of the most effective first steps for bladder control don't involve medicine or surgery: **pelvic-floor muscle exercises** (often called Kegels) strengthen the muscles that hold urine in, and **bladder training** retrains the bladder to wait longer between trips. Done consistently, they help stress leaks, urgency, and frequency — and they're free and safe.

How They Help

- **Pelvic-floor exercises** build the muscle support under the bladder and urethra, so you leak less with coughing, lifting, or exercise — and can suppress urgency.
- **Bladder training** gradually stretches the time between bathroom trips, calming an overactive bladder and reducing frequency.

Finding the Right Muscles

The pelvic-floor muscles are the ones you would use to **stop the flow of urine** or hold back gas. Squeeze and lift those, **without** tightening your belly, buttocks, or thighs, and **without holding your breath**. (Don't practice by actually stopping your stream — that's only a way to locate the muscles.) If you can't find them, a **pelvic-floor physical therapist** can help, sometimes with biofeedback.

LEARN THE TERMS

Pelvic floor

The sling of muscles supporting the bladder, bowel, and (in women) the uterus.

Kegels

Squeeze-and-lift exercises for the pelvic-floor muscles.

Bladder training

Gradually increasing the time between bathroom trips.

Urge suppression

Calming a sudden urge so you can reach the toilet without leaking.

Biofeedback

A tool that shows you when you're using the right muscles.

Pelvic-floor PT

A therapist who specializes in these muscles.

HOW LONG UNTIL IT WORKS? Give it time — most people notice improvement in about **6–12 weeks** of regular practice, and it keeps improving with consistency. Like any exercise, the benefit fades if you stop, so the goal is to make it a lasting daily habit.

A Simple Daily Routine

- 1 **Squeeze** the pelvic-floor muscles and hold for a count of 3–5 seconds, then fully relax for the same time.
- 2 Repeat about **10 times**, and do **3 sets a day**. Build up the hold as you get stronger.
- 3 Add a few **quick, strong squeezes** to use right before you cough, sneeze, or lift (“the knack”).
- 4 Relaxing fully between squeezes is as important as the squeeze.

Bladder Training

- Keep a short **bladder diary** to see your pattern.
- When an urge hits, **stop, squeeze the pelvic floor, breathe, and let the urge pass** — then walk calmly to the toilet.
- Gradually extend the time between trips by 15-minute steps toward every 3–4 hours.

Good to Know

- You can do these **anywhere** — no one can tell.
- Consistency beats intensity; tie them to daily cues (meals, red lights).
- If you have **pelvic pain** or a very tight pelvic floor, the goal may be to **relax** (not strengthen) — ask your team.

Ask your team if:

- You can't tell whether you're using the right muscles
- Exercises **worsen pain** or pressure
- You see no change after a few months

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Pelvic-floor exercises and bladder training are safe, free, proven first steps for leaks, urgency, and frequency.
2. Squeeze the right muscles (without holding your breath), relax fully between, and retrain the bladder to wait a little longer.
3. Give it 6–12 weeks and keep it up. If pain worsens or you can't find the muscles, ask about pelvic-floor physical therapy.