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Maintaining and regaining inner strength, post-partum

By Tyler Dyck

The question I am most frequently asked by pregnant patients is “What are Kegels and why do I need to do them?”

A “Kegel” is essentially a muscle contraction of your pelvic floor muscles which are a sling shaped group of muscles that span between your pubic bone and tailbone. Kegel exercises were named after Dr. Arnold Kegel, an American obstetrician. The muscles are important in supporting your abdominal organs (ie. rectum/bladder and uterus in females), sexual function, and maintaining urinary/fecal continence.

It is especially important for women to consistently perform pelvic floor muscle exercises both during and after pregnancy. Women are at higher risk for urinary incontinence (ie. leaking urine) during their child bearing years for the following reasons:

- Increased weight of the uterus and baby place more pressure on the pelvic floor
- Change of hormones during pregnancy loosens pelvic joints and stretches ligaments which support the uterus
- Vaginal delivery can tear or overstretch the pelvic floor and perineal tissues
- Having a multiple birth or several children sequentially increases strain to the pelvic floor
- Prolonged second stage of labor (ie. pushing stage) can increase pressure on the pelvic floor and organs

A recent study done by a physiotherapist in Norway demonstrated that intensive pelvic floor muscle exercises done during pregnancy significantly reduced episodes of incontinence both during pregnancy and three months after delivery. Another study actually showed that women who had done specific daily exercises spent less time in the second stage of labor compared to those who did no exercises. They also required fewer episiotomies.

If you are experiencing difficulty holding your urine during sneezing, coughing, and laughing post delivery then it is possible that your pelvic floor muscles were weakened or damaged during your child’s birth. If this problem continues several weeks post delivery then a physiotherapist with specialized training in pelvic floor

problems can help. This is a common problem as 10-30% of women will likely experience urinary incontinence at some point in their lifetime.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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