

INFORMATION SHEET 14: WHY USE A PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISER?

Why is a pelvic floor exercise device worthwhile?

Dr Kegel, the originator of the kegel (or pelvic floor) exercise program, did not intend his exercises to be conducted on an empty vagina. The original exercise device that he developed was very close in design to the perineometers in use today (like the PFX2 and Pelvexiser).

But through the years, his message has been lost and women have been encouraged to try unassisted exercising. For many women, this has resulted in poor outcomes, with one study showing that 51% of women could not even produce an effective pelvic floor contraction with verbal instructions alone (**Bump and others, 1991**).

It is increasingly clear that this is not the best way for many women, and that better results can be achieved with the assistance of exercisers and other devices. This has now been confirmed by **research** from around the world.

Studies have looked at a range of devices, including vaginal cones, vaginal balls, electronic muscle stimulators, and others. Women in study groups usually already have pelvic floor weakness, with symptoms like incontinence. Many of these studies find that women using these devices show a better improvement than control groups.

So for women who either

- cannot commit to regular visits to a health professional for financial, geographical, or time reasons, or
- prefer to try self-help methods

an exercise device will usually produce a notably better result than trying to do pelvic floor exercises on an empty vagina.

Read more about the role exercisers can play in [overcoming incontinence](#), [enhancing sexual response](#) and strengthening the [pelvic floor after childbirth](#), on our website, or by asking us for our other information sheets.

What types of exercisers are available?

Many pelvic floor exercise products are sophisticated measuring devices intended for use by the health professional to diagnose and treat patients suffering from incontinence or other symptoms of a weakened pelvic floor. They often use electricity or complicated measuring mechanisms, and are specifically designed for use in a treatment setting. This type of device is generally not suitable for home or personal use.

However there are other products on the market that are appropriate for a woman to use at home, and indeed have been designed and manufactured for just that purpose. They are an excellent option for a woman who wants to deal with early symptoms of a weakened pelvic floor.

Pelvic Floor Exercise brings together a range of this type of product, along with the information that allows women to make an informed choice.

How do exercisers help to build muscle strength?

There are three main ways in which an exerciser can help. The exact advantages to be gained depend on the type of exerciser:

- Exercisers can provide "resistance"

This is really commonsense. Body builders do not build strong biceps by repeatedly contracting their arms in the air; they do it by using weights or other devices that provide resistance.

- Exercisers can provide feedback that the exercise is being done correctly

Many women find it extremely hard to do pelvic floor exercises correctly, especially when they first begin, so they benefit from using devices that confirm - either through a measuring gauge or by movement - that the correct muscle is being exercised. This feedback helps to confirm that the pelvic floor muscles are being contracted correctly, and also that the contraction is being fully held for maximum benefit.

- The presence of an exerciser can stimulate the muscle

Exercisers inserted into the vagina can provide a powerful sensory feedback which makes the pelvic floor

contract to retain the device. Some products act to stimulate a muscle response simply by their presence, and others use a safe electrical current to create the stimulation.

How do exercisers encourage women to continue an exercise program?

Many women don't keep up a pelvic floor exercise program because it is too hard to fit exercises into daily life and because they are uncertain about whether they are exercising correctly, particularly in the early stages. Others become discouraged if they exercise for weeks with little improvement, and so begin to doubt whether the exercises are working.

The use of exercisers helps to overcome these problems and encourage women to continue their exercise regimes. Feedback devices reassure a woman that she is exercising correctly. Weighted inserted devices work on strengthening the pelvic floor while a woman goes about her normal activities. Electronic stimulators harness the proven effects of electrical current to build muscle strength.

Most importantly, many women find that pelvic floor exercise devices produce better results than unassisted exercising. They take encouragement from this discernible improvement and therefore persist with their exercise regime.

What is the best exerciser for me?

The answer depends on your needs and circumstances. Some women prefer exercisers that can be inserted and left for a while. Others prefer the certainty of an exerciser with a dial that allows them to track their improved performance as they exercise regularly. Still others prefer an exerciser with a more "fun" image. And some are prepared to commit to the longer periods of time required when using an NMES device.

Your choice will also be affected by the current state of your pelvic floor muscles. Vaginal cones or NMES devices are more likely to be suggested by physiotherapists when a woman is unable to contract or feel her pelvic floor muscles for herself. Whereas perineometers are generally more appropriate for women who can already contract their pelvic floor muscles but wish to increase muscle strength.

If you are in doubt about what to choose, you may find our *Information Sheet 25: Different types of exercisers and what they do* helpful. We are happy to answer your questions about products, but we also encourage you to discuss your specific needs with a women's health physiotherapist or other health practitioner.

For more information about the benefits and features of each exerciser, visit our [online shop](#) and compare the features of our products, or call and ask for the leaflets on the products that interest you.

Why should I buy an exerciser from Pelvic Floor Exercise?

Many good pelvic floor exercisers have been available for sometime but are often hard to track down, particularly for women who want to exercise independently at home. Many exercisers have only been available direct from the distributor, via a health professional or via a pharmacy. And most pharmacies who do stock exercisers, only keep one type, so it's impossible for a woman to compare the features of the products on the market and make an informed choice.

Pelvic Floor Exercise fills this gap by bringing together the very best exercisers available on the Australian market, to make choosing and buying easier. Whatever your motivation for strengthening your pelvic floor, we provide information to help you choose the best product for the purpose.

Of course, the information we provide is not a substitute for discussing your specific needs with a health professional, such as your GP, a women's health physiotherapist or gynaecologist.

<p>The material presented in this information sheet is intended as an information source only. The information is provided solely on the basis that readers will be responsible for making their own assessment of the matters presented herein and are advised to verify all relevant representations, statements and information. The information should not be considered complete and should not be used in place of the advice of a health care provider. Pelvic Floor Exercise does not accept liability to any person for the information or advice provided in this sheet, or for loss or damages incurred as a result of reliance upon the material contained herein.</p>
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