

INFORMATION SHEET 2: USING VAGINAL BALLS

How do vaginal balls assist in strengthening the pelvic floor?

Vaginal balls act as a "weight" in the vagina and therefore can strengthen the muscles simply through the automatic contraction that occurs to hold them in place (Glavind 2001). The fact that they have a larger diameter than vaginal cones means that they do not give the sensation of "falling out" that some women experience with cones.

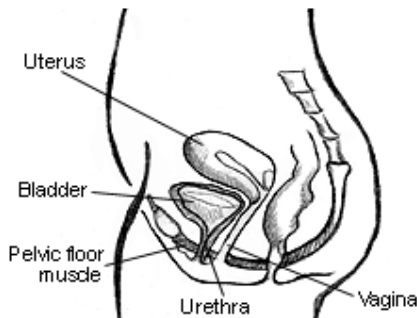
Vaginal balls can also be used to provide resistance around which to contract the pelvic floor muscles in an exercise program. In a small pilot study in which women used vaginal balls for 30 minutes every day for 12 weeks (Glavind, 2001), participants stated that their incontinence was either "no longer a problem" or "greatly improved".

Another research study found that incorporating vaginal balls into a pelvic floor muscle exercise program was more effective in reducing urine leakage than unassisted pelvic floor exercises. In this study, balls of different diameters were used over the course of the exercise program:

"women squeezed their pelvic floor muscles maximally for 20 seconds in the standing position using a ball weighing 65 g.; this was followed by relaxation of the muscles for 20 seconds in the sitting position. The exercises were repeated 10 times. This set of exercises was repeated after a short rest. The whole procedure was performed twice a day. Submaximum pelvic floor squeezes were performed while moving, e.g., walking, housekeeping, and doing gymnastics, once a day for 15 minutes using a 50-g ball. After two months of exercise, the women received new vaginal balls, with a diameter of 32 mm. The maximum PFM squeeze was performed with a 100-g ball and the submaximum PFM squeeze was performed with an 80-g ball, and the program was repeated for another 2 months". (Arvonen and others, 2001)

Inserting Vaginal Balls

Use a small amount of lubricant on both the balls and the vagina to ease insertion; avoid using too much as this will make the balls slippery and harder to hold in place in use. When using duo balls, insert the ball furthest from the rope first. Because of the link between the two balls, once the first is inserted the vaginal muscles may try to push it out before you can insert the second. To avoid this, try to lie on your back or put your pelvis up so that gravity can assist you. Alternatively, some women find that adopting a standing position, with one leg lifted onto a chair, works better for them.



Positioning Vaginal Balls

When using a single vaginal ball, insert it so that its lower edge is at least 2cm inside you. If using duo balls, the lower edge of the lower ball is at least 2cm inside you. To act as a weight that stimulates the pelvic floor muscle to contract, the lowest point of the lower ball must be inserted far enough that it sits **above** the pelvic floor muscle; it therefore needs to sit at the approximate point where the line pointing to the vagina ends in the picture below. The correct distance can vary between women, but it should be pushed in a similar distance to how you would normally use a tampon. When using duo balls, the ball further from the rope will move further into the vagina as the second ball is pushed in. Be sure that you leave the rope outside of the vagina, as you will need it to remove the balls.

Vaginal Balls in use

Like any new product, the balls may feel slightly uncomfortable at first, but this is usually only because they are a new sensation for your body and you tend to be extremely "aware" of them.

Depending on the strength of your pelvic floor muscles, you may find that vaginal balls tend to slip out when you first use them. If this happens, be patient and persist with the program. As the muscles become stronger, they should naturally hold the vaginal balls in place, even under physical exertion and whilst coughing and sneezing.

When you walk, the motion causes the material inside the balls to move, creating the silent tickle which may be felt by the vaginal muscles. Most women can undertake all normal activities whilst using vaginal balls but some say they find it less comfortable to sit when wearing them, depending on individual anatomy (vaginal length, position of uterus etc.). In any case, it is generally not beneficial to use vaginal balls (or any vaginal weights) whilst sitting, as muscle strengthening can arise from both the:

- stimulation created by the presence of the balls which only occurs during movement, and
- automatic contraction of the muscles as they try to hold the balls in place against the effect of gravity whilst you are standing and moving around.

When you have finished your vaginal workout, the balls may be removed by slowly pulling on the loop. They should then be cleaned with soap and water, and dried. If you are unsure about how to use vaginal balls, or if you experience no improvement after using them for 12 weeks, you should consult your health practitioner or a women's health physiotherapist.