

USING YOUR PFXA

Devices such as the PFXA are called perineometers. Perineometers measure movement in the pelvic floor muscles via pressure and show the strength and duration of that movement. Physiotherapists use more sophisticated perineometers for diagnosis and treatment, but the PFXA can be used easily at home.

Assembling and using your PFXA

Follow the instructions provided in the booklet that comes with your PFXA. The tubing clicks into the sensor, make sure you are holding the firm end of the sensor when you attach it to the tubing, not the soft middle. Then click the cup shaped end onto the blue handle. Turn the knob on the side of the blue handle anticlockwise until it is in line with 0.

YOUR PROGRAM

1. Check that you have the correct action

Pelvic floor (or kegel) exercises involve squeezing and lifting the pelvic floor muscles. When you do this correctly, your PFXA will register the pressure created on the guage. However it is also possible to create some movement in your PFXA reading by bearing down and/or tensing your abdominals (6 pack) which can be harmful to your pelvic floor.

CAUTION !! If you try too hard you can make the guage move with abdominal pressure which means that your pelvic floor is not being used correctly. It is better to progress slowly and only as you feel you can comfortably hold a level using just your pelvic floor. This can take 3-6 months of regular use.

Before you begin an exercise program with your PFXA, check to make sure you are doing the squeeze and lift correctly and that your PFXA is actually measuring your squeeze, rather than your pushing pressure:

- Lie on your side with knees bent. You can rest your fingers very lightly on the sensor outside the anus to feel what is happening.
- Place the sensor in your anus using a good coating of water based lubricant and do an anal squeeze – closing the anus and lifting up - you are trying to squeeze and lift the sensor within the anus.
- If you are using your muscles correctly, the firm part of the sensor outside your anus will move inwards, it shouldn't be pushed out as this means you are pushing, rather than squeezing. Pushing will not help your pelvic floor muscles and can weaken them further.
- **There should be no activity or clenching/squeezing in your buttocks/ thighs or abdominals.** It is normal to feel the transversus (deep abdominal) gently tighten in co-ordination with the pelvic floor muscles and will be felt as a gentle tensing at the level of the hip bones, but there should be no other abdominal activity or pelvic tilting.
Practise the correct movement whilst using your PFXA. Even if you are only able to squeeze and contract a little checking your technique regularly will lead to an improvement for most people.

2. Record your Resting Pressure

- The resting pressure is the pressure recorded when you first insert the sensor and indicates the tone of your pelvic floor muscles, particularly your anal sphincters at rest. This is an important measure as a good resting pressure or tone means that your sphincters and pelvic floor muscles are able to better support and control your bowel.
- As you progress your program, you should see this resting pressure improve.
- Insert the sensor and note the reading on the guage- this is your resting pressure.
- Now turn the knob clockwise until the red needle drops to 0.
- You are now ready start your exercises.
- Be aware that your resting pressure may be higher if your rectum is full so each session record if you have done a bowel motion or not. It is much easier to use your PFXA **after** a bowel motion.

3. How long can you hold?

- Squeeze and lift and time how long you can hold the guage up noting the reading you reach.
- If it starts to drop down, the pelvic floor muscles are letting go or losing tension – you can try to pull the squeeze back up.
- Then rest for twice as long as you held for. E.g squeeze 5 seconds, rest 10 seconds. Do not try to hold for longer than 10 seconds with this maximal contraction.

4. Repeats – how many can you do?

See how many times you can repeat the squeeze and lift above, getting it to the same level on the gauge. Record steps **2** to **4** – this is your starting point for your program.

Do not be discouraged if you can only repeat a couple of times and/or move the gauge only a small way. This is your starting point and you will improve from here.

5. Practise some quick squeezes

with a short hold to train the fast twitch fibres in the pelvic floor muscles. Again, count how many you can do (aim for 10-20) and repeat each training session. This helps to train the anal sphincter to switch on quickly when you most need them to e.g when you need to get to the toilet which helps prevent leaks!

5. Your goal

The aim is to build up to 10 x 10 second holds on the highest level you can on your gauge followed by 10 quick squeezes.

6. How often should I use my PFX?

Be guided by your treating health professional but daily or every second day is ideal as you train. Once you have reached your goal then using once a week to check you are maintaining your strength is important.

7. What else can I do?

It is important to not only strengthen your pelvic floor muscles but to then make sure you use them when they are meant to be used. For example they should contract automatically when you cough, sneeze and lift in order to stop you from leaking and to prevent downwards movement of the pelvic organs or loss of wind or faeces from the rectum.. You can try doing some of these functional activities with your PFX probe in your anus and see if you can contract prior to and hold through a cough or blowing your nose.

If you find you are completely unable to squeeze and contract your pelvic floor muscles at all, we suggest you:

- Consult a women's health physiotherapist or continence advisor. Phone the National Continence Helpline on 1300 33 00 66 for more information or search the Australian Physiotherapy Association's database to find a Continence and Women's Health physiotherapist in your area.
- Consider electrical stimulation to get you started. You can find our range of machines and electrodes for this on our website

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