

Regaining and maintaining continence is a matter of both muscle and mind control. Radical prostatectomy affects a man's voiding dynamics and the brain needs to learn ways of dealing with these changes. Fortunately, there's help available. Physiotherapists specializing in men's health issues can teach you the latest evidence-based strategies and exercises.

Pelvic floor exercise techniques

The three issues that need to be addressed when performing pelvic floor exercises after radical prostatectomy are: motor patterning/learning; endurance and submaximal (i.e. partial) contractions; strengthening in postures where leakage occurs. First, it's important to know if/when you're contracting your pelvic floor. The easiest way is to start at the back. When you tighten your anus to prevent gas from escaping, you're contracting your pelvic floor. As you squeeze more, you'll feel the contraction move forward until your scrotum lifts up and your penis retracts. The muscles involved in this movement comprise the entire pelvic floor muscles. Focus your exercises around these muscles, trying not to tighten your abdomen and buttocks. Breathe normally; don't hold your breath. Remember, the pelvic floor is not a large group of muscles. Eventually, you might even be able to focus the contraction at the front (where the rhabdospincter is located). Below are three common exercises we give patients in our clinic after radical prostatectomy. We use diagnostic real time ultrasound to confirm if you are performing the exercises correctly and can observe how you control your pelvic floor muscles. We recommend that you perform these exercises daily for six months after the catheter has been removed.

Example Daily exercise routine

Exercise 1

1. Contract your pelvic floor 50% (a little bit) for 5 seconds then
2. Contract your pelvic floor to 100% (do not overdo it) for 5 seconds then
3. Slowly relax to the 50% range for a further 5 seconds
4. Rest for 5 seconds. Repeat 10-15 times, 3 times per day.
5. If you leak during this exercise, try keeping a slight contraction while resting.
6. Perform this exercise in sitting and standing

Exercise 2

1. Quickly, as **fast** as you can, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles 100% for 2 full seconds....
2. Relax for 1 second and repeat 10 times.
3. Rest for 30 seconds then repeat 4 times.
4. DO not hold your breath or contract your tummy when performing.
5. Perform this exercise at least 3 times per day, ideally in standing in the morning, sitting in the afternoon and lying down at night.

Exercise 3

1. Squeeze your pelvic floor 10-20% of maximum (as little as possible).
2. Hold this for 1/2 an hour while going for a walk.
3. Perform this once per day.
4. If you feel you “lost” the contraction, slightly squeeze your pelvic floor and continue with your walk.

The key to doing proper pelvic floor exercises is not to overdo it. Remember it is not about power and strength but about control. If you can gently contract your pelvic floor and hold it longer, this will be more beneficial for regaining continence.

I have found that approximately 70% of the men I see at the clinic are doing their Kegel exercise wrong and are overdoing it (contracting their abdominal, holding their breath, contracting buttocks, legs etc.). A phrase I tell my patients is “Less is more...” We use diagnostic ultrasound imaging to show the client what they are doing and show them how to perform the exercises correctly. Men have found it to be a terrific biofeedback tool.

We also have men use a 24 hour pad test to help objectively identify their incontinence and help identify if they are improving over time, what causes them to leak more or less, and gives an indication when they might become fully continent.

If you are interested in a consult, you can reach me via email at blandry@fpclondon.com. I am located in London, Ontario. You can call me at Family Physiotherapy Centre at 519-439-6111. I usually see patients for 3-4 visits over a 4 month time period. I have seen patients all the way from Kingston to Windsor and have taken phone consults as far away as New Zealand.

Yours in health,



Bill P. Landry
BScPT, BScH, CAFCI, CWCE, MCPA
Principal, Senior Physiotherapist
Family Physiotherapy Centre of London