



## ***To Kegel or not to Kegel?***

The answer to this is different for everyone. Each person has varying degrees of pelvic floor muscle strength, length, endurance, tension, coordination, symmetry, tone, pain, and scarring. We all have unique histories that impact our overall function. Those of us engaged in extreme sports or physically demanding exercise could have overactive pelvic floor muscles. Painful or traumatic experiences can also contribute to neglect, pain and dysfunction within our pelvic bowl/floor.

Most of us haven't been taught about our pelvic floor muscles, let alone whether they are functioning optimally. There is conflicting advice about whether we should do kegels (contractions to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles) or not. Where do you fit into this? I wrote this self-assessment to help you start learning how your pelvic floor is functioning.

Getting an assessment done from a pelvic floor specialist, whether a physical therapist or a Holistic Pelvic Care™ provider, can guide you further with healing and function. These practitioners are there to teach you, empower you and prescribe exercises and modifications that will contribute to your pelvic health and control. Studies show the roughly 50% of women do pelvic floor exercise incorrectly without personalized instruction and verification.

## ***Pelvic Floor Assessment***

*Find a quiet, private space where you won't be interrupted. The bedroom or bathroom works well. Have clean hands, trimmed nails, lubrication (good oils: coconut, Vitamin E, olive, or a commercially made lube of your preference) and a mirror.*

*Prop yourself up in bed, or bathtub in a reclined position, with your legs supported. Put your hand on your heart and take a deep, centering breath here and connect with the feeling of love. Imagine sending a light beam of that love and self-acceptance to your pelvic bowl and pelvic floor. Reassure yourself that you're safe and breathe to relax your muscles. From this place of loving kindness, pick up the mirror and visualize your pelvic floor. Watch as you do some pelvic floor (PF) contractions (kegels) and releases. Do you see your muscles lift? Can you hold the contraction for ten seconds? Do you see your muscles return back to a resting position? Try bulging your PF (like you are pushing out stool). Try all the movements again and notice how it looks and feels when you contract/relax/bulge your PF muscles.*

*Insert a lubricated finger or thumb inside your vaginal canal. Notice if it feels tight or is painful. Notice your emotions. Can you feel these muscles expand downward with a deep inhale and then return upward with your exhale? Squeeze your finger with your PF then fully relax again. Gently move your finger to massage the right side of the canal; then the left side; then the bottom.*

## ***Dr. April Bolding, PT, CCE, CD***

*This can help relax and stretch out tight PF muscles. Breathe and ease your touch if there's pain. Pain is telling you that this area needs respectful attention and healing. To end this assessment, try pushing your finger out. Can you do this effectively?*

### ***What does your assessment mean?***

When pelvic floor muscles are overactive or tight, there can be some movement with a contraction (kegel), but the muscles have trouble relaxing afterward. If there is no movement or very little movement with a contraction, this can mean that your muscles would benefit from strengthening and improved coordination.

An indicator of good pelvic floor strength and endurance is when you can pull the pelvic floor muscles up and hold for ten seconds, ten times in a row (with a five second rest in-between). Being able to lift these muscles up quickly is also a valuable skill to prevent leaking with coughing, sneezing and laughing.

Visit [AprilBolding.com](http://AprilBolding.com) to learn how you can heal and resolve pelvic floor issues independently with the **Phoenix Heart ARISE™ Pelvic Health Program** or with the help of a physical therapist.

***Dr. April Bolding, PT, CCE, CD*** owns a private practice in Seattle, WA providing much needed healing to women of all ages. Most major insurances accepted.

## Dr. April Bolding, PT, CCE, CD

Signs that indicate that pelvic floor muscles are overactive (tight, tense, or shortened) and may need help to release and relax:

- Urinary incontinence (leakage)
- Chronic straining with bowel movements or urination
- Pain with vaginal or anal penetration, initially or throughout
- Pain with speculum exams
- Difficulty with tampon use
- Avoidance of sexual activity
- History of sexual assault or abuse
- History of invasive medical procedures in pelvic region
- History of being a dancer, exercise instructor or super athlete
- Pelvic pain (deep groin pain; rectal pain; vaginal/perineal pain)
- Pelvic floor tightness when stressed
- “Butt clenching;” tight inner thighs
- Tailbone pain

Signs that indicate underactive pelvic floor muscles, in need of strengthening:

- Urine or fecal incontinence (leakage)
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Heaviness in pelvic floor
- Difficulty holding in gas (including vaginal gas)
- Low back pain
- Unstable pelvic joints (Sacroiliac)

*\*These are generalizations. Within the same pelvis, overactive and underactive muscles can co-exist.*

## April Bolding, PT, CCE, CD



I am a Womxn’s Health physical therapist, Maya Abdominal Therapy practitioner, Holistic Pelvic Care™ provider, childbirth educator, doula, author speaker, and mother. My passion is to connect with people of all ages to heal, nurture and celebrate the Sacred Feminine within them.

My degrees, certifications, professional and life experience provide the foundation for my work, but it is my intuition combined with the wise knowledge of my client that guides how I apply them. I help women heal from pelvic floor dysfunction and pain, as well as menstrual and fertility challenges. I nurture mothers throughout their pregnancy, labor and postpartum as well as help them move through grief after miscarriage and loss. I created the *Phoenix Heart ARISE™ Pelvic Health Program* because not everyone has access to specialized physical therapy and everyone deserves compassionate, skilled care to heal and restore optimal function.



## Dr. April Bolding, PT



## Pelvic Floor Self-Assessment For Womxn

*Too long have womxn’s pelvic issues been discounted and called normal.*

*We need a new normal.*

*Here’s a guide to help you evaluate your body and guide you to seek specialized care when you need it.*



*AprilBolding.com*