

## Getting the Pelvic Floor Ready for Dilation

### Relaxation, Breathing and Visualization

Having an environment where you feel safe, calm and can relax is a very important part of dilation. You should not feel stressed or feel tense going into dilation. One of the ways we can try to reduce tension and relax before dilating is using our breath.

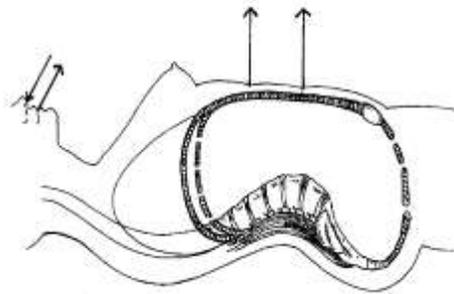
Diaphragmatic breathing will help quiet brain activity resulting in relaxation of all the muscles and organs of the body (including the pelvic floor). Correct use of this dome shaped muscle (diaphragm) for breathing will help settle down or relax the autonomic nervous system. Proper use of the diaphragm for slow rhythmic deep breathing (rather than shallow upper chest breathing) will aid in improving symptoms of incontinence, prolapse, pelvic pain and low back pain

### Diaphragmatic Breathing

#### Instructions

- Lie on your back or sit in a comfortable position
- Place your hands on the lower portion of your rib cage/abdomen
- Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth
- Keep your lips together but teeth apart
- Breathe in deeply through your nose
- Feel your rib cage widen and your abdomen expand into your hands
- Keep your upper chest, neck and shoulders relaxed as you breath in
- Breathe out/exhale completely through your mouth
- Allow your abdomen and rib cage to sink back to its original position
- Breathe slowly and rhythmically
- Do not force your breathing
- Practice this 5 minutes/day

Coordinating this breathing technique with pelvic floor contraction and relaxation will help you better be able to control your pelvic floor muscles. Exhalation occurs during coughing, sneezing and laughing.



**To coordinate breathing with pelvic floor contractions**

- Focus on the relationship between your diaphragm and the pelvic floor muscles
- As you breathe in through your nose, let your pelvic floor muscles drop/relax
- As you exhale through pursed lips, tighten and contract the pelvic floor muscles

Using tools for meditation or relaxation such as a guided meditation or listening to relaxing music are very helpful. There is even a dilator meditation available at: <https://yourpaceyoga.com>

**Visualization** can also be helpful to relax your pelvic floor muscles and better prepare yourself for dilation. There are many kinds of visualization exercises – use one that works well for you. One example is the reverse petal flower release.

**Reverse Petal Flower Release**

As you breathe in for 5-7 seconds, send your inhalation breath to your vaginal muscles visualizing and imagining them as a large tight rose flower that is beginning to blossom in the springtime. Imagine the rose opening petal by petal. Try this exercise for five breaths.



## Exercises

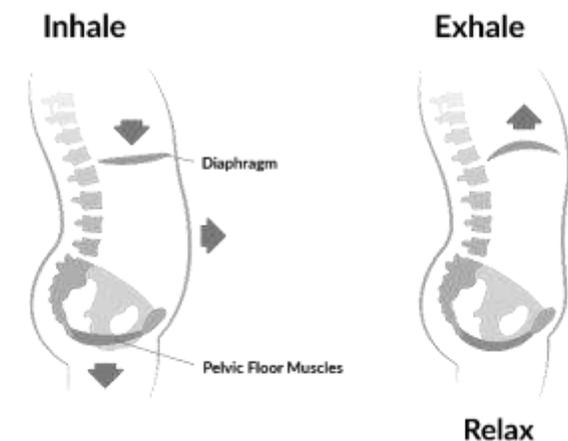
Doing some exercises to loosen your pelvic floor muscles, decrease tension and get the body ready for dilation can be a very valuable part of the dilating schedule. Two main groups of exercises include “reverse kegels” and “pelvic floor lengthening.” Try these activities and find the exercises that work well/feel good for you.

### Reverse Kegels/Pelvic floor Drops and Breathing

Your ability to have conscious release of the pelvic floor muscles is a critical part of your recovery program. You must learn to focus on and relax these muscles before they can become functional again and pain-free. Relaxing your pelvic floor, or reverse kegels is also called **downtraining**. The feeling of dropping your pelvic floor is like the moment of relief when you have reached the bathroom; when you urinate or have a bowel movement, you first relax and let the muscles go. The key to dropping your pelvic floor is **visualization**, and **deep breathing**. The best way to consciously release tension from the pelvic floor muscles is to try to release the muscles while you inhale. When you inhale properly with diaphragmatic breathing, your diaphragm actually lowers to make room for the air, so it is natural to also lower and relax the pelvic floor muscles. When you exhale, your diaphragm rises to push the air out, and you can then gently lift your pelvic floor muscles. It is also important to time your inhalation and exhalation so that they occur over the same length of time. (ie. 5 seconds in, 5 seconds out).

**If you have difficulty with coordinating the in-breath with the release, DON'T let that stop you. It is perfectly alright to do a reverse kegel with exhalation at first until you master the correct techniques. The most important thing is to increase your awareness and focus and to practice reverse kegels on a daily basis, even an hourly basis if needed. You must learn to drop or lengthen your pelvic floor fully.**

It is helpful to take a mirror to look at your contraction and relaxation. When you perform a contraction (Kegel) your clitoris should move slightly downward, your anus should wink, and the perineal body should move up and in. On the reverse Kegel, you should see the anus release and your perineal body move downwards towards the mirror. Eventually, once you have mastered the art of relaxing your pelvic floor muscles, you will need to check in with your pelvic floor throughout the day and let go of any tension that you discover.



## Reverse Kegel Downtraining Series – To start at 3-4 weeks post-op\*

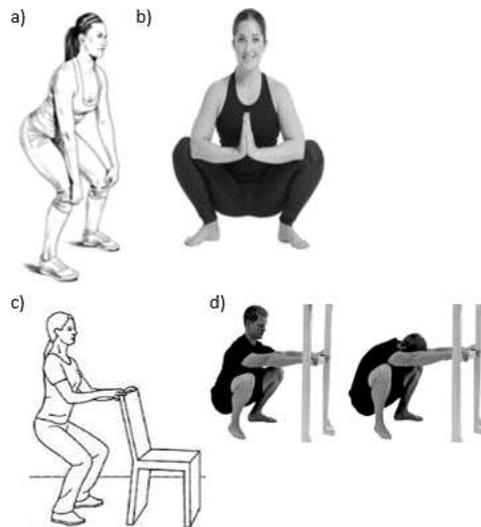
Child's Pose Release	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Go on your hands and knees and bring your body into child's pose. Bring one hand onto each sit bone and keep contact with the bones as you perform your pelvic floor muscles relaxation child pose's release.</li><li>2. If your sit bones do not touch your heels, place a pillow between your gluts and your feet.</li><li>3. Imagine as your breathe in for a count of five that your sit bones move away from each other.</li><li>4. Simultaneously feel your pelvic muscles release and relax. Make sure your in-breath lasts as long as the pelvic release. Perform this exercise for five breaths.</li></ol>	
Side Lying Sit Bones Apart	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lay down on your right side and place your left hand on your left sit bone. As you breathe in, pull the left sit bone away from the right. Feel and imagine your pelvic floor muscles dropping outward, relaxing and releasing.</li><li>2. Hold this release for five seconds, go back to neutral or start position and repeat for five breaths.</li><li>3. Repeat on the other side.</li></ol>	
Stomach Lying Sit Bones Apart	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lay down on your stomach, putting one hand on each of your sit bones.</li><li>2. As you breathe in, feel your sit bones widen, and your pelvic floor lengthen or drop.</li><li>3. As you breathe out, let your pelvic floor go back to a neutral position.</li><li>4. Repeat 5 times</li></ol>	
"Dropping the Undies"	
Sit with good posture with your weight evenly distributed on your sit bones. Practice diaphragmatic breathing for several minutes to centre yourself. Breathe in for a count of five	

and imagine that your undies and your pelvic floor muscles are dropping into the chair. Make sure to direct your in-breath to your pelvic floor muscles. With your **visualization**, collect an pelvic pain you might have and imagine the pain leaving your body with your exhalation or out-breath.

### Squat for Pelvic Floor Release

This pelvic floor stretch is a great way to help open, loosen and to lengthen the pelvic floor—a good foundation for the healing process.

1. To do a squat, stand with your legs apart, feet extending a few inches beyond the shoulders, toes turned **slightly** outward. Keeping your back as straight as possible, squatting down until your rear is 3-5 inches off the floor. Use the wall if you can't keep your back straight. Relax into the squat as you do 3-4 deep breaths. Lengthen your pelvic floor a little more with each in-breath. Your arms should rest inside your thighs, with your hands together or relaxed to the floor. Again, keeping your back straight, place your hands on your knees and push yourself up. **Repeat two times.**
2. To minimize the amount of bending in the knees during the squat, put your elbows on your knees in the short stop position. Your feet should be wide apart. Go down into a  $\frac{1}{2}$  squat in this position, widening your sit bones as you go down, breathing into your pelvic floor on the inbreath and letting it shorten a bit on the breath out. Hold for 3-5 breaths and **repeat two times.**
3. You can also do the squat with a strap hanging securely from a closed door or a deep squat to a chair or counter. You want to be as close to the door as possible, without your knees touching the door. The squat mechanics are similar to the above description, but lengthening your spine simultaneously will give you a deeper relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles.



Happy Baby Pose	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lay on a firm surface-on a mat on the floor or on a hard mattress. Bring your knees up to your chest and then let them relax and rotate out to the side so that they flare outward. Use your hands to hold your inside or outside of your feet depending on your reach (you can also use a strap).</li><li>2. Stretch as you deep-breathe for 4-5 breaths. Do not bounce, and do not push hard. Just stretch gradually and progressively dropping your hips and sacrum towards the surface as you fill and empty your lungs. Do 2 reps.</li></ol>	 A black and white photograph showing a person lying on their back on a mat. Their knees are pulled up towards their chest and are rotated outwards to the sides. The person's hands are holding the inner sides of their feet. Their feet are pointing upwards, and their head is resting on the floor.
Cat/Dog Stretch	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. On your hands and knees, bring your pelvis to a neutral position. As you inhale, tilt your pelvis back, bring your head up for cow pose. Then on your exhalation tuck your tailbone in, arch your back and bring your chin in towards your chest for cat pose.</li><li>2. Repeat 10 times.</li></ol>	 A black and white photograph showing a person in a quadrupedal position on a mat. They are on their hands and knees, with their pelvis tilted back, arching their lower back and lifting their head and tailbone. This is the Cow Pose (Bhujangasana).

## Pelvic Floor Lengthening (Pre-Stretch Work)

Many of these exercises require pillows or a foam roller. If you do not have these, you can improvise with items you have around your home, like a cushion etc.

**Obturator Internus Lengthening:** Frees the hip joint, and tight muscles between the hips and the pelvic floor. Lie on your back, with a rolled towel under your pelvis, lift feet off the floor, and drop the hips out into a frog position. Place hands on the outside of legs to support them. One leg at a time, bring your knee in and down, touching the foot to the ground. Reverse this arc by bringing the knee up and out into your stationary hand. As you bring the knee up and out, imagine the muscle between your hip joint and pelvic floor lengthening. Repeat 5x on each side.

**Iliopsoas Lengthening:** Lie on your back with your knees bent up and feet flat. Put the foam roller underneath your hips. Draw one knee into your chest, allowing the other leg to straighten towards the ground to lengthen the Psoas muscle. Do not let the straight leg's foot touch the floor. While lengthening your Psoas, gently draw your ribcage towards the ground. Breathe, and hold for 30-60 seconds.

**Dead Bug Release:** Lie on your back, bring your knees to your chest and place one hand on the inside of each knee. While inhaling, imagine your sit bones coming apart and your pelvic muscles releasing. Inhale for at least five seconds, exhale and repeat for five breaths.

**Pillow Relaxation Lift:** To decrease pelvic pain and pressure, and to rest the pelvic organs, rest the pelvis on three pillows for 5-10 minutes 1-2x/day.

**V-Stretch:** Lay on your back with buttocks and legs against the wall. GENTLY, glide your legs against the wall into a V-position maintaining contact with the wall. DO NOT drop your legs too much. Visualize your body relaxing, and all of the pain and tension leaving your body with each exhale.

**Foam Roller Goddess:** Lie on the foam roller with outstretched hands. Make sure to keep your entire spine on the foam roller as you practice diaphragmatic breathing. Visualize the stress leaving your body as you focus on the areas of the spine that feel tight. Practice your mind body techniques in this position as well. Stay here at least 5 minutes.

## Lubricant

Lubrication is an important part of dilation. Because the surgical dilators are made of a product that can be damaged by a silicone lubricant product, we recommend a water-based lubricant. Because there are so many kinds of lube with such variable price points, the best thing to do is find a lube that is a price that you can afford and that works well for you. Ideally you would have a lube that was not too concentrated (that has an **Osmolality <1200 mOsm**) and that would be a **pH around 6 (between 5-7)**. Unfortunately, this information is not listed on most lube bottles and to find this information might require some internet searching. The most important thing is to find a lube that works well for you, is a price you can afford, and where you can use as much as you need is the most important thing.

Water based lube often is not the most adherent to the surface of the dilator and some people find it helpful to put lube into the vaginal canal prior to putting the dilator in. A product that is used to this end is the “Lube Launcher”

