

Does It Work?

Pelvic Floor Strengtheners

BY SHARLENE BREakey

Google “Kegel trainer” and up pops a dizzying array of gadgets that look like sex toys but are meant to strengthen the pelvic floor, the muscles that cradle the bladder, uterus, and bowel. According to the National Institutes of Health, a quarter of women in this country have a pelvic floor issue, causing problems like painful sex, weakened orgasm, leaky urine, and constipation. While Kegel exercises are the traditional therapy, “many women don’t know how to do them properly,” says Tamara Grisales, M.D., a urogynecologist at UCLA. Here, experts discuss which gadgets might help:

INTRAVAGINAL BIOFEEDBACK DEVICES

WHAT THEY ARE: Made of soft silicon and wirelessly connected to smartphones, these devices sit in your vagina as an app talks

you through a squeeze-and-release regimen. Some use gamelike graphics to guide you.

WHAT WE KNOW: Little research exists on home devices, but a 2011 review showed that women given verbal cues or biofeedback on their pelvic floor regimen were significantly more likely to improve urinary incontinence issues than those who did Kegels without it.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Yes—as long as you see a gynecologist or an occupational or a physical therapist first, so they can determine if you have underactive or overactive muscles and devise the best routine, says Lindsey Vestal, an OT who created the online course Kegels That Work.

BRANDS TO TRY: Elvie Trainer (\$199, elvie.com); kGoal (\$149, kgoal.com); Perifit Kegel Exerciser (\$139, perifit.com)

ELECTROSTIMULATION DEVICES

WHAT THEY ARE: Wands that deliver gentle electrostimulation,



GETTY IMAGES

causing vaginal and pelvic floor muscles to contract. Some provide biofeedback.

WHAT WE KNOW: According to Heather Jeffcoat, a physical therapist and the author of *Sex Without Pain: A Self-Treatment Guide to the Sex Life You Deserve*, these can be especially helpful for severely lax muscles; a 2013 review found that electrostimulation improved

some types of incontinence in women. Just be aware that they could be painful if not used properly, Jeffcoat says.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Maybe, but for this cost, a smarter investment would be sessions with a PT who specializes in the pelvic floor. Their exam will inform a regimen they create just for you. “Two people can have similar symptoms but very different problems,” says Dr. Grisales.

BRANDS TO TRY: The Yarlapp Kegel Exercise Kit & System (\$299, yarlapp.com); Intensity 2.0 for Pleasure and Health by Pour Moi (\$229, pourmoi.com); Attain (\$349, incontrolmedical.com)

KEGEL EXERCISE WEIGHTS

WHAT THEY ARE: Round or oval objects inserted in the vagina that can slip out if you don’t contract your muscles, helping you train and strengthen the pelvic floor.

WHAT WE KNOW: A 2013 review found that using cone-shaped weights was more effective than doing no pelvic floor exercise at all, but there is no conclusive evidence that the weights are more effective than Kegels alone.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Not unless a physical therapist or doctor recommends them. (If so, choose a silicon weight and use it for up to one minute per repetition, breathing deeply in between.) “Holding them in for too long can create muscle tension rather than solving the problem,” says Amy Stein, a physical therapist and the author of *Heal Pelvic Pain*.