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**GOT DOWN-
THERE ISSUES?**
Kegels may solve
lots of them.

Umm... Would You Get a Personal Trainer for Your Vagina?

*Yes, such a thing does exist!
Writer Alix Strauss went
behind closed doors to find
out what "love-muscle
fitness" really means.*

I am lying on a table in a small room with a sheet covering my naked lower half. Lauri Romanzi, M.D., a New York City urogynecologist who specializes in pelvic fitness, is probing my vagina to test my muscular movement down there. Sadly, I learn, there is none. Not only is my vagina untoned, Dr. Romanzi says, but she has determined through delicate poking that my muscles are also sensitive and spasm easily. What that means: Inserting something—oh, let's say a penis—hurts. That's

one of the reasons I'm here. Sex can be painful for me. Plus, I pee *all* the time. (Give me a Diet Snapple on a road trip and you might as well attach a catheter.) And the awful truth is that there are thousands of women like me. Studies have found that about two thirds of women will have painful sex at some point in their lives, and up to 25 percent of women ages 25 to 39 may have bladder-control problems. Dr. Romanzi specializes in fixing issues like these, but even perfectly healthy young women can benefit from the knowledge (and workouts) she shared with me. Quite simply, stronger pelvic-floor muscles can make for much better orgasms.

Down-There Basics

The first thing Dr. Romanzi proposes in my quest for fitter love muscles is Kegels—the *right* kind of Kegels. Most women have heard of these exercises, but 30 percent of women who do them are doing them wrong, according to Dr. Romanzi's research. One common mistake: relying on the thigh muscles instead of targeting the pelvic-floor muscles, which form a sort of hammock from your pubic bone to your tailbone. They help

hold your pelvic organs in place, are key in controlling urination, and contract in a very feel-good way during orgasm, says Amy Rosenman, M.D., a pelvic surgeon in Santa Monica, California. You can't be shy if you want to learn how to target these muscles correctly. First, prop your hips up on a pillow, pull your knees up and look at your lady parts with a hand mirror; then try to squeeze the vaginal opening closed by pulling in and up. Your perineum—the patch of skin between your anus and vagina—should appear to retract. Find the mirror thing too up close and personal? "Pretend that you're trying to prevent yourself from passing gas; when you grip the anal muscle, you're also gripping the vaginal ones," says Dr. Rosenman. (You can also try to clench your muscles as if you're stopping the flow of urine.)

Once you've got the hang of it, contract and hold for five seconds, then release. Do this 10 times in a row, three times a day, each time in a different position—standing, sitting, lying down—to use slightly different muscle fibers.

OK, Now Practice!

If you want *more* benefits, you'll want to add resistance, just like a regular workout. In addition to Kegels, Dr. Romanzi had me use small vaginal weights called StepFree (\$60, srsmedical.com) that you insert and hold in place while doing low-impact activities like putting away the dishes or folding clothes. Feeling ambitious on my first try, I decided to skip to the heaviest one, which weighed about the same as a jumbo egg. It felt like a heavy, slightly painful tampon. I made coffee; it slipped out. I retrieved a folder... *slip*. So I tried the lightest one (about as heavy as four nickels), and by the end of one week I was able to walk around, bend down and keep it in.

Was it an extreme approach? Perhaps, but then mine was an extreme case, and I'm glad I stuck with it. I'm taking blessedly fewer trips to the bathroom and have less discomfort down there.

At my final session with Dr. Romanzi, I could pulse, hold and relax—all things (yes, *all*) a woman with strong, healthy love muscles should be able to do. Cue *Rocky* music: I body-built my vagina! ■

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