

HEALTH

GUIDE TO DOWN UNDER | WEIGHT-LOSS SUCCESS | MEAL MAKEOVER

To The Core

LADIES, KEGELS ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING.

SAMANTHA MONTPETIT-HUYNH, FOUNDER OF CORE EXPECTATIONS, SHOWS US HOW TO GET A STRONG PELVIC FLOOR.

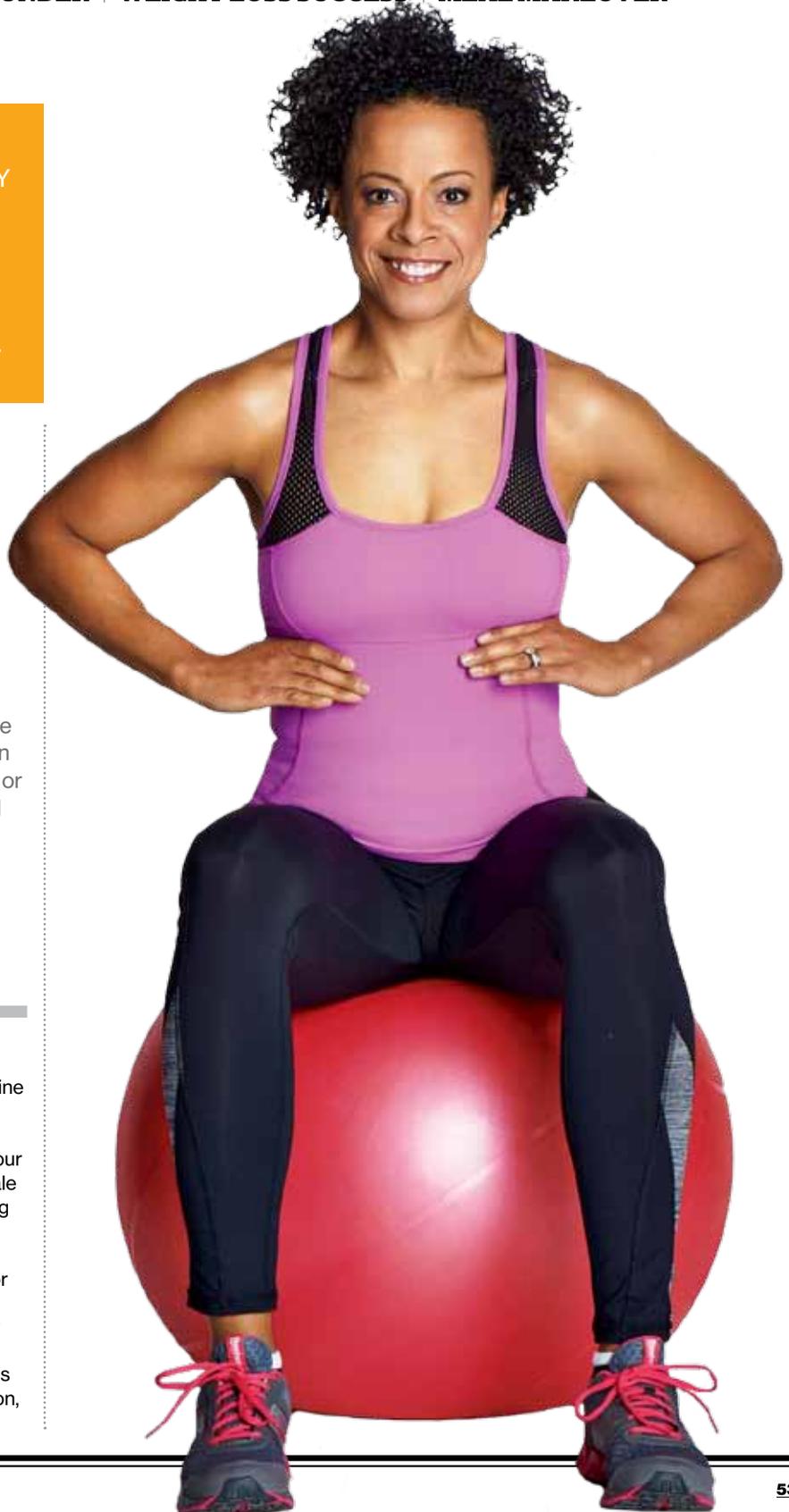
BY KATE DALEY

WHAT IS YOUR PELVIC FLOOR?

It's a sling of muscles extending from the front of the pubic bone to the tailbone that supports uterine organs (the vagina, cervix and uterus), the small intestine, bladder, urethra and rectum. These important muscles help maintain bladder function, prevent uterine prolapse (a weakening of the pelvic floor in which the uterus slips down into or protrudes out of the vagina), and rectum and bladder prolapse.

It can also affect sexual experience. Pelvic floor muscles are connected to overall core stabilization and work with your diaphragm during respiration.

1 CORE BREATH Sit on a stability ball or chair with your spine neutral and your shoulders relaxed. Place your hands on either side of your torso and breathe in through your nose, expanding your rib cage. Exhale through pursed lips while contracting the muscles around your rib cage. Continue for three to four breaths, then start to engage your pelvic floor by imagining you have a jelly bean at the opening of your labia and that you're picking it up with each exhale and releasing it with each inhale. This engages your core muscle foundation, the pelvic floor.



PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF COULSON. HAIR AND MAKEUP: JUKKA FORTRESEMME. HAIR CARE/MAKE UP FOR EVER/PLUTINO GROUP. STABILITY BALL: PILATES BALL. MODEL'S OWN. TANK TOP: \$25; PANTS: \$30; RUNNING SHOES: \$60; MARSHALLSCANADA.CA

THINK IT WON'T HAPPEN TO YOU?

As many as 3.3 million Canadians (about 10 percent of the population) will experience some form of urinary incontinence (UI). Women who give birth vaginally are at greater risk of short-term leakage, and about one-quarter of female athletes have experienced incontinence while participating in sport (with high-impact exercises like jumping and running provoking the most leakage). Muscles weaken, stretch and can be damaged over time due to a variety of factors: age, multiple vaginal deliveries, excess weight, menopause and exercising too soon after birth. (Montpetit-Huynh says women should wait a minimum of three months after birth before restarting high-impact exercises.)



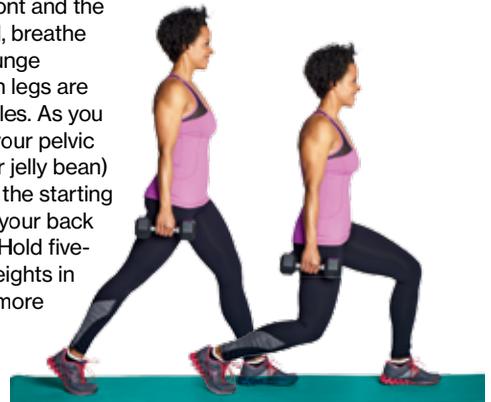
2 BRIDGE Lie on your back and place a small ball between bent knees. Inhale and, as you exhale, slowly lift your glutes off the floor and pick up that jelly bean (as explained in move 1). Keep your heels under your knees and give the ball a slight squeeze, targeting your hip adductor muscles, as you come up. Hold this position for two to three seconds. Inhale and place your hips back on the ground, relaxing your pelvic floor. Repeat eight to 10 times.

5 SQUAT Stand with your shoulders relaxed and a neutral spine. Breathe in and sit back into a squat until your quads are parallel to the floor, keeping your back flat and feet parallel. Exhale, squeezing your pelvic floor (pick up that jelly bean) as you return to standing. Repeat eight to 10 times.



3 CLAMSHELL Lie on your side with a neutral spine and your head resting on your lower arm. Keep your legs bent and place your heels together. Breathe in and, as you exhale, squeeze your pelvic floor (pick up your jelly bean) and open your top leg upward, keeping your heels together. Hold this position for two to three seconds. Inhale and return to resting position. Repeat eight to 10 times.

6 LUNGE With one leg straight in front and the other bent behind, breathe in and dip into a lunge position, until both legs are at 90-degree angles. As you exhale, squeeze your pelvic floor (pick up your jelly bean) and push back to the starting position, keeping your back heel off the floor. Hold five- to eight-pound weights in both hands for a more advanced lunge. Repeat eight to 10 times.



4 HOVER With your knees just a little wider than hip-width apart and your toes touching, sit back on your heels. Breathe in and, as you exhale, squeeze your pelvic floor (pick up your jelly bean) and lift upward and slightly forward into a kneeling position. Inhale and sit back in slow, controlled movements. Repeat eight to 10 times.

WHAT ELSE YOU CAN DO:

- **SEE A PHYSIOTHERAPIST.** If you're experiencing UI issues, see your doctor to rule out other factors, then make an appointment with a pelvic-floor physiotherapist.
- **TRY "PFILATES."** Developed by Dr. Bruce Crawford, a urogynecologist from Nevada, this variation on Pilates incorporates a series of pelvic-floor exercises into your workout.

➤ **GO ONLINE:** Check out our video version of this workout at canadianliving.com/pelvicfloor.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU DO THESE WORKOUTS?

Like every other muscle in your body, if you don't use it, you lose it, says Montpetit-Huynh. For prevention and maintenance, perform these moves three to four days per week. Regular strengthening in combination with seeing a pelvic-floor physiotherapist can improve, if not cure, urinary incontinence.