Patient-Related Instruction 19-7
Decreasing Intra-abdominal Pressure

- Avoid constipation, and do not strain with defecation (i.e., bowel movement). Drink lots of fluids to help avoid constipation and soften stools. Consult with a dietitian or physician about dietary changes and medications to avoid constipation.
- If you have difficulty getting out of the chair, scoot to the edge of the chair, lean forward, and push up with the arms. Avoid bearing down and breath holding. Instead, contract the abdominals inwardly, breathe out, and contract the pelvic floor muscles (PFM) while you stand up.
- Lift properly with inward contraction of abdominals and outward breath on effort. Avoid bulging the abdominals outward and bearing down.
- Exercise correctly using an inward abdominal contraction. Avoid bearing down and pouching the abdominal muscles outward. Unnecessary increases in intra-abdominal pressure may occur while lifting weights that are too heavy and with abdominal exercises that are too advanced. Curl-ups or sit-ups commonly cause the abdominals to bulge. Avoid curl-ups if you have organ prolapse. You should advance to weight lifting, advanced abdominal exercises, and jogging slowly and carefully if you have PFM weakness.
- If you are a postpartum woman, it is especially important to restore adequate PFM strength before returning to high-impact aerobics, jogging, and advanced weight lifting. The jumping jack test (see Patient-Related Instruction 19-2: Testing Your Pelvic Floor Muscles by Performing the Digital Vaginal Self-Examination) can be used to determine the ability of the PFM to withstand stress. You should be able to do five jumping jacks one-half hour after urinating before returning to exercises that repeatedly increase pressure on the PFM. It is important to continue active rehabilitation of the PFM during your return to vigorous exercise. If incontinence persists or worsens, you may have to delay the return to vigorous exercises until more strength of the PFM is gained.
- It is important to seek medical treatment for chronic coughing or vomiting and to contract the PFM during coughing or vomiting. You can counterbrace the PFM by contracting during coughing and vomiting. Support the perineal tissue with gentle upward pressure of the hand over the perineum during coughing and vomiting spells.