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Jeżeli chcemy, aby te informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić 01932 723553

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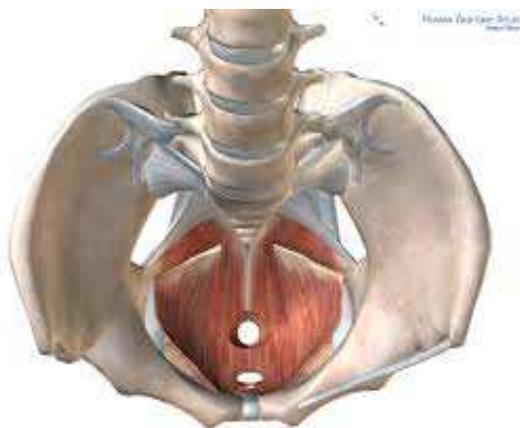
Website: www.ashfordstpeters.nhs.uk

Pelvic Pain

Women's Health Physiotherapy

There are many causes of Persistent Pelvic Pain. Women's Health Physiotherapists are specialists in the treatment of many pelvic dysfunctions, pelvic pain being one of them. This leaflet aims to explain the role of physiotherapy in the treatment of pelvic pain. In order to do so, it is important to consider the influence of the pelvic floor muscles.

The pelvic floor is comprised of muscles and connective tissue that sit at the base of the pelvis. It extends from the pubic bones at the front, to the coccyx, or tail bone at the back. It attaches at the sides to the sitting bones.



The pelvic floor has many important functions:

1. It supports the organs of the pelvis from underneath and helps prevent prolapse or movement downwards of these organs into the vagina. This is a very important function as we are

Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecology Physiotherapy
pogp.csp.org.uk/

www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)

Pelvic Pain Partnership www.pelvicpartnership.org.

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01932 723553 or email pals@asph.nhs.uk. If you remain concerned, PALS can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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Points to be aware of:

- Existing bladder symptoms may temporarily worsen before they start to improve.
- Increasing your awareness of your pelvic floor may stir up strong emotions. Discuss any worries that you may have with your physiotherapist.
- You may experience some temporary soreness after treatments. This should not last longer than 24 hours. If it does, please inform your physiotherapist.

Useful Resources

Heal Pelvic Pain by Amy Stein. (McGraw-Hill Books, 2009)

The Vulvodynia Survival Guide by Howard Glazer and Gae Rodke (Airlift Books, 2002)

Headache In The Pelvis by David Wise and Rodney Anderson

(National Centre for Pelvic Pain research, 2008)

Physiological Relaxation by Laura Mitchell

(Springer books, 1984)

Vulval Pain Society www.vulvalpainsociety.org

upright creatures and gravity exerts a constant downward force on these organs.

2. It helps to maintain the continence of the bladder and bowels to prevent leakage on our way to the toilet or when we cough, sneeze or perform physical activities.
3. It is a core stability muscle working with our deep abdominal and lower back muscles. It therefore contributes to the stability of the joints in our lower back and pelvis.
4. It contributes to our sexual function by increasing the sensation we experience during intercourse.

The pelvic floor contracts and relaxes just like any other muscle in the body. When this is impaired, dysfunction can occur. This is unfortunately very common, especially in women. Dysfunction can be as a result of weakness due to low muscle tone, but the muscle may struggle to relax and therefore has high tone and this is called an overactive pelvic floor.

Causes of Over Active Pelvic Floor

Trigger points

The pelvic floor can become damaged due to trauma (post-childbirth), inflammation, straining or chronic holding on to muscles over a period of time. This can result in the development of 'trigger points'. These are very irritable points in the muscle which are painful on compression and can give rise to what is

called 'referred pain' i.e. pain felt elsewhere within the body. Trigger points can increase the tension in a muscle which shortens it further and can have a knock-on effect to neighbouring muscles.

Nerve Impingement

The pudendal nerve innervates the pelvic floor. If the pelvic floor is overactive and constantly contracting, or in spasm, it may lead to this nerve becoming compressed or impinged and this will generate pain.

Chronic pain

If pain has existed for a considerable length of time, the way the nervous system responds to incoming information can be affected. It can 'turn up the volume' of the signals and misinterpret other signals as a reason to generate a pain response. This is termed 'Central Sensitisation'. Stress and anxiety can also turn this volume switch up. Generally the more tense and anxious the person is, the greater their awareness of pain.

What can you do about it?

Firstly, it is important to be aware of the need to be able to take 'time out' in order to practice the techniques described below. Most of us lead very busy lives and we do not prioritise our own health and well-being highly enough. Getting the right work/life

Vaginal Dilators

Your physiotherapist may suggest the use of Vaginal Dilators. These are silicone devices that can be used by you at home to gradually release pelvic floor tension and desensitise the area. They are available on prescription from your GP or can be bought on-line.

Cardiovascular exercise

Studies show that cardiovascular exercise helps to combat stress, anxiety and pain. Try to find some time to participate in an activity that you enjoy at least 3 times per week, even if it is just a 20 minute walk.

Pelvic Relaxation Group

This is run once every 4 weeks. It is an hour-long class which is held in the small gym and is normally attended by a small group of women. It is not a place to discuss your personal problems or symptoms (unless you are happy to do so). It is intended to be an educational, informative group to increase your awareness of the causes and treatment for your condition.

Please wear loose fitting comfortable clothing as there is a large practical element which includes hip stretches, relaxation and breathing exercises.

You will need to book into this group at the physiotherapy reception.

Prayer Squat Release is particularly effective in encouraging pelvic floor relaxation – see the picture below.



Manual Therapy

As part of your treatment, your physiotherapist may use some manual techniques to correct a musculo-skeletal dysfunction.

This may include release tight or restricted muscles techniques referred to as 'myofascial release' and may focus on the external muscles around your abdomen, hips or thighs. She may instruct you as to how to perform these techniques for yourself at home, using circular massage or 'skin rolling' techniques.

Where the restrictions lie within the pelvic floor muscles, this release will take place internally, via the vagina. This will only be done with your valid consent. Your physiotherapist may instruct you how to do this independently.

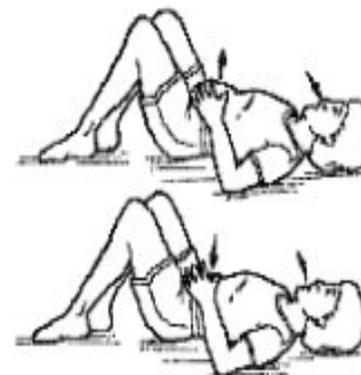
balance which includes finding time to switch off and relax every day is crucial and to follow the advice and exercises that your physiotherapist recommends.

Relaxation technique

Your physiotherapist will teach you an effective relaxation technique. It is a skill that does need to be mastered and some people will find it more of a challenge than others. Persevere and then over time you will find it more effective. Once your skills in relaxation have improved, it will be more likely that you will be able to release any tension within the muscles of the pelvic floor.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

The diaphragm is the large dome-shaped muscle that is located underneath your lungs. During a diaphragmatic breath, the diaphragm lowers as it contracts causing the abdominal contents to be compressed from above and consequently the tummy will bulge outwards. See Diagram below:



The downward pressure from above will also have an effect upon the pelvic floor, encouraging it to release and relax. Focussing on the feeling of 'letting go' will help you to gain a greater awareness of the tension that rests in your pelvic floor throughout the day.

Your physiotherapist will instruct you further on retraining your breathing pattern to include your diaphragm.

Sniff Flop Drop.

This is an exercise that involves taking a quick in-breath and at the same time allowing your tummy to flop and your pelvic floor to drop. It encourages release and relaxation of your pelvic floor muscles. The in-breath (sniff) results in an expansion of the tummy (Flop) and a release of the pelvic floor (Drop). This Sniff Flop Drop exercise is found in detail at the pelvic physiotherapy website which is listed in the references at the back of this leaflet. It is an exercise which needs to be practised at regular intervals throughout the day.

Visualisation

It may help to visualise the pelvic floor as a large tight rose that is beginning to blossom. Imagine the rose opening up, petal by petal. This may help you to feel the pelvic floor relax. Try this exercise for 5 breaths and repeat several times throughout the day.

Gentle warmth

A hot water bottle or wheat bag placed over the lower tummy or directly on the perineum can be effective in encouraging relaxation of the underlying muscles.

Stretches

Stretching the muscles that attach around the hip and pelvis can also help to release the pelvic floor. Some of these stretches are shown below:



Hip Flexor Stretch



Adductor Stretch



Hamstring Stretch



Hip Rotator Stretch



Hip Flexor Stretch