

THE PELVIC FLOOR

PHYSIOTHERAPY

ACTIVE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO WOMEN THROUGHOUT LIFE. POORLY CONTROLLED MUSCLES CAN LEAD TO PROLAPSE AND LOSS OF BLADDER OR BOWEL CONTROL. PHYSIOTHERAPISTS TRAINED IN CONTINENCE MANAGEMENT CAN ASSESS YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES AND, IF NECESSARY, HELP YOU REGAIN CONTROL.



WHAT DO PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES DO?

The pelvic floor muscles support the bladder, uterus, vagina and bowel. They form a muscular and elastic floor across the bottom of the pelvis. When tightened, the muscles lift the organs and constrict their openings. The muscles relax to empty the bladder and bowel.

Stretching of these muscles during childbirth and straining with constipation sometimes causes muscle damage and leads to incontinence. As there may be other reasons for loss of bladder and bowel control, professional advice should be sought for all incontinence problems.

SIGNS OF POORLY CONTROLLED PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

- Leaking urine when sneezing, coughing, running, laughing (or other sudden actions).
- Not getting to the toilet in time.
- Tampons don't stay in place.
- Vaginal or anal wind (flatus) when bending and lifting.
- Bulging felt at the vaginal opening (prolapse).
- Difficulty emptying the bowel completely.

YOU NEED SPECIAL ATTENTION IF YOU

- Are pregnant or a new mother.
- Are menopausal.
- Lift heavy objects often.
- Suffer from constipation.
- Are overweight.
- Cough frequently.
- Have low backache.
- Go to the toilet often to pass small amounts of urine.

BENEFITS OF PELVIC FLOOR CONTROL

- Active lifestyle without wet or soiled pants.
- Control of wind (flatus).
- Firm vagina.
- A sense of control!

YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF BY

- Drinking two litres of fluid each day.
- Minimising coffee, tea and cola drinks.
- Staying within a healthy weight range.
- Seeking help for a chronic cough which makes your bladder problems worse.
- Avoiding straining with constipation.

Don't put up with incontinence - it can be cured!

HOW PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP

Some physiotherapists have special training, skills and experience in continence management. They can help if you have incontinence, constipation or prolapse, or simply want to learn how to use your pelvic floor muscles correctly and safely.

Many women are unable to use their pelvic floor muscles correctly unless they receive individual pelvic floor muscle testing and training - simply trying to tighten the muscles is not enough. It is also important to learn to use your abdominal muscles correctly while exercising the pelvic floor.

Physiotherapy teaches you how to:

- Exercise your pelvic floor muscles correctly.
- Retrain pelvic floor muscles.
- Regain pelvic floor control while sneezing, coughing, laughing and lifting.
- Maintain pelvic floor control.



GENERAL

Many physiotherapists in private practice are listed in the Yellow Pages. Physiotherapists also work in public hospitals and community health centres. Check to see if a physiotherapist is a member of the APA. Members of the APA are bound by a professional Code of Ethics and have access to extensive and continuing postgraduate education programmes.

Contact the Australian Physiotherapy Association in your state or territory for the names of physiotherapists in your area who have a special interest in the pelvic floor and continence management.

HEALTH REBATES

You may consult a physiotherapist either directly or by referral from your medical practitioner. Most private health insurance funds offer rebates for physiotherapy treatment.

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Move well. Stay well.

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