



**Physical Therapy Services for Women ...  
Exercise Your Options!**  
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Physical Therapy (PT) offers a conservative approach to manage pain, avoid surgery, decrease medications, and for living an active lifestyle (this article describes PT options available specifically for women's health issues).

PT can facilitate a comfortable/healthy pregnancy, bladder/bowel control, decreased pelvic pain, increased range of motion/strength following breast/abdominal/pelvic surgery, lymphedema management, address general orthopedic issues, provide rehab following a gastric bypass, or maximize the quality of life for someone diagnosed with osteoporosis or fibromyalgia.

**Prenatal/Postpartum:** During one of the most miraculous times in a woman's life, childbearing years can also bring discomfort for the new mom: low back pain, pelvic pressure, decreased control of urine/feces (incontinence), sciatica (leg pain and numbness), severe leg cramps, or other musculoskeletal issues. PT helps alleviate these discomforts through postural awareness techniques, individualized stretching/strengthening programs, soft tissue mobilization/myofascial release (massage), bladder education, and pelvic floor strengthening. PT can increase a woman's body awareness to help her proudly accept her changing appearance during pregnancy and help prepare her body for the "main event" about to occur! The PT goal is to make the childbearing years healthy, comfortable, and enjoyable as possible.

After delivery, PT can help women experiencing sacroiliac (SI) joint pain, weakened abdominal muscles, pain from c-section incision or episiotomy, pelvic floor muscle weakness/pain causing urinary/fecal incontinence, or those who experience pain during intercourse.

**Urinary/Fecal Incontinence:** More than one in four women between 25 and 55 years, (and at least 50 percent of all women at some point in their lives) will experience episodes of incontinence (involuntary loss of bladder/bowel control). This may occur when one laughs, coughs, sneezes, or is unable to get to the bathroom in time. PT provides conservative options as an alternative to surgery or medications. Incontinence does not have to be just a part of getting older, or as a result of childbearing. By learning the role of pelvic floor muscles, getting an individualized

exercise program, bladder retraining, utilizing electrical stimulation and/or biofeedback to retrain and strengthen the muscles, incontinence symptoms can be decreased or eliminated. Even if surgery is required, PT techniques can help prepare the body for surgery and aid in a faster recovery time to make the surgery more successful.

**Pelvic Pain/Dysfunction:** Many women experience pelvic pain/dysfunction for years before seeking treatment. The pelvic region consists of muscles and tissues just like any other part of our body—muscles that can be weak, tight, in spasm, surrounded by scar tissue, or altered secondary to a postural issue. Whether a woman complains of pelvic pain following childbirth or surgery, or has pain during intercourse or prolonged standing/exercise, a physical therapist trained in women's health can offer treatment options. Through ultrasound, soft tissue mobilization/myofascial release, massage, electrical stimulation, biofeedback, pelvic floor awareness, and an appropriate exercise program, many women find the relief they seek.

**Breast/Abdominal/Pelvic Surgery:** After surgeries like mastectomy, breast reconstruction or hysterectomy, many women experience pain, decreased range of motion, excessive swelling, incisional tightness, or muscle weakness in the involved regions. PT offers patient education, pain relief measures, edema control techniques, scar mobilization, massage, and appropriate exercise.

**Lymphedema:** Lymphedema is a swelling of a body part that can occur for many reasons, but is a particular concern for cancer survivors who have undergone radiation and/or lymph node removal. Currently, the most effective and least invasive approach is *Complete Decongestive Therapy* (CDT). CDT consists of skin care, manual lymphatic drainage, bandaging/compression garments, and specifically designed exercise programs. A physical therapist that is a certified lymphedema therapist can assist with successful management of lymphedema. PT can also help provide important education to patients who have undergone cancer treatments in order to prevent the possible occurrence of lymphedema.

**Osteoporosis/Fibromyalgia:** PT can also meet the specialized needs of women diagnosed with osteoporosis or fibromyalgia. PT helps the patient manage this condition through education, an individualized exercise program, and pain relief techniques. Strong emphasis is placed on postural habits and defining an appropriate activity level. The PT goal is to facilitate a decreased level of pain/discomfort to maximize the quality of life.

**Gastric Bypass Surgery:** Deciding to undergo weight loss surgery is a very important decision. It is also important to be aware that surgery is only the first step in achieving your long-term weight loss goals. Exercise and proper nutrition is essential to ones success. A PT can be very helpful in assisting you with the exercise component of your weight loss program. The overall goal of our *PT program for the Gastric Bypass Patient*

is to help patients achieve their weight loss goals after weight loss surgery in a safe, effective, and individualized manner. Components of this program include **exercise** (stretching, strengthening, endurance, home exercise program), **postural/body mechanics education, manual therapy techniques** as needed (scar mobilization, myofascial release), and **pain relief modalities** as needed.

**General Orthopedic Issues:** Some conditions that can be addressed by a physical therapist include joint pain, neck and back pain, muscular weakness, sports injuries, or following orthopedic surgery. A physical therapist will evaluate your current limitations, range of motion, strength, posture, balance, endurance and level of independence with daily activities. Together with your therapist, you will establish appropriate goals for your specific situation. The physical therapist will establish a plan of care that will enable you to reach your potential safely and effectively. Types of PT procedures may include the following: **strength training, joint mobilization, manual therapy, ultrasound, neuromuscular electrical stimulation, myofascial release, customized exercise programs, ice/heat, TENS, and traction.** Our goal is to get you as painfree/active as possible, as well as maximizing your level of performance/independence.

As health care consumers, we need to know as much about our bodies and health as possible. It's important to know health care options and with our physicians' assistance, choose the approach we feel the most comfortable with. Exercise Your Options!

*Jennifer Whaley is a physical therapist and owner of Physical Therapy for Women, Inc. At **Physical Therapy for Women, Inc.**, pts receive therapy by a licensed Physical Therapist who specializes in Women's Health. Therapy sessions are private, one-hour sessions with direct hands on treatment by the therapist. Patients need to be referred by their physician to receive these services. Most insurances are accepted, and services are reimbursed as for any other PT diagnosis. Physical Therapy for Women, Inc. is located on Oleander Drive in Wilmington, NC. PTFW can be reached by calling (910)798-2318. If you have any questions regarding our services, or would be interested in scheduling a luncheon at your office, please do not hesitate to contact us. We welcome your interest and thank you for your support.*