



Whether its Pelvic Pain or Incontinence Physical Therapy Can Help...

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Most women will wait several years before seeking professional treatment for pelvic dysfunctions such as pain, urinary frequency, or urinary/fecal incontinence. (Incontinence—involuntary loss of bladder or bowel control) Many think these issues are just a natural part of aging, or are inevitable because they have experienced childbirth. Many women experience pain during intercourse, yet very few inform their health care providers. Many are unaware that a physical therapist specifically trained in the area of woman's health can provide them with a conservative, non-surgical option to help alleviate their discomforts.

A physical therapist specializing in women's health addresses many issues. During the initial evaluation, a thorough medical history is obtained, specific bowel/bladder issues discussed (such as frequency, urgency, leakage or pain), and an internal/external pelvic floor (PF) muscle assessment is completed. The patient is evaluated for abdominal/pelvic scar tissue or tenderness, muscle spasms, and pelvic floor muscle strength/endurance. From there an appropriate pelvic floor rehabilitation program can be established. Patients maybe asked to complete a bladder diary which allows us to examine an individuals total fluid intake, bladder irritants, voiding habits, leakage episodes, etc... Ideal bladder habits are strongly recommended to promote optimal bladder/pelvic health.

If PF muscle weakness is noted, the patient is instructed how to complete strengthening exercises (kegels) correctly and effectively. The patient is given a comprehensive home exercise program involving the muscles that surround the pelvis. We also use internal/external perineal biofeedback—which involves inserting a sensor either vaginally or rectally, and visualizing strength, control, endurance, and resting ability of the PF muscles on a computer screen. This has proven to be an effective method to increase a patient's awareness of the PF muscles and to increase their control. If a patient has very weak PF muscles, internal perineal electrical stimulation may be utilized. A vaginal sensor is inserted and an electrical current is delivered to achieve a stronger PF contraction and “retrain” the muscles to work effectively. Patients are frequently seen prior to gynecological surgery to maximize PF strength and effectiveness of surgery.

Manual therapy is a large component of a comprehensive therapy approach for pelvic floor dysfunction. Soft tissue mobilization/myofascial release is used to treat adhesions,

tight muscles/connective tissue, or painful scars. Pain following c-sections or other abdominal/vaginal surgeries, episiotomies or perineal tearing are just a few conditions that can greatly benefit from manual techniques. Many times the pelvic floor muscles present with hypertonus dysfunction—where the patient is unable to effectively relax the PF muscles and they remain in spasm. This patient may present with chronic pelvic pain, pain during intercourse, difficulty initiating the flow of urine or inability to completely empty their bladder. A manual technique known as **internal trigger point release** is very effective in alleviating these spasms, and facilitating a more normal resting tone. Biofeedback and electrical stimulation are also helpful in treating muscle spasms through the use of visual awareness and fatiguing the PF muscles to promote relaxation. Perineal ultrasound, moist heat/cold are other modalities that can be utilized to assist with pain relief and/or edema.

Some general goals for treating this specific population are: 1) to become as painfree as possible, 2) achieve ideal bowel/bladder habits, 3) reduce/eliminate urinary/fecal incontinence, 4) strengthen the pelvic floor muscles effectively, and 5) establish a life long awareness of ideal bladder habits and pelvic floor strengthening. We provide comprehensive bladder/pelvic education to empower the patient with ability to manage their condition. This includes anatomy, function, instruction in the importance of water intake/reduction of bladder irritants, or possibly education prior/post gynecological surgery.

*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.*