

PELVIC FLOOR 101



Slung across the pelvis, the pelvic floor quietly plays an integral role in our daily lives

WHAT DOES IT DO?

- 1) Holds back bladder and bowel movements so we can decide when to use the bathroom
- 2) Supports the pelvic organs
- 3) Controls sexual function
- 4) Stabilizes the low back, hips, and pelvic girdle

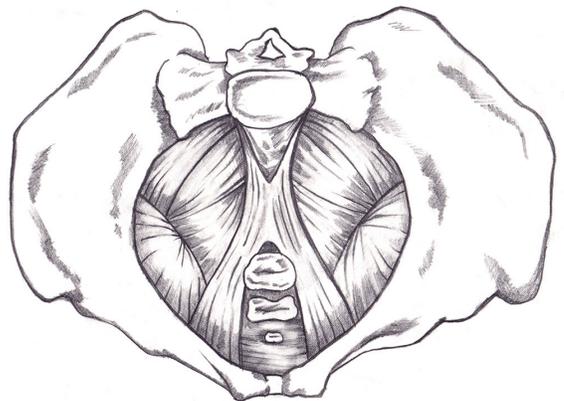
CAN'T I JUST KEGEL?

Kegels (voluntarily squeezing the pelvic floor) are often ineffective or actively harmful. Often the pelvic floor is already too tight and over-taxed; Kegels put further strain on the muscles and can exacerbate pelvic symptoms.

Even when Kegel exercises are appropriate, they should only be a small component of an overall plan for pelvic health that addresses the underlying cause of the problem.

WHAT IS IT?

The pelvic floor is the term for the muscles, ligaments, nerves, and tissue that create a natural hammock slung across the pelvis. These muscles are continuously active, performing vital functions that we typically take for granted.



Attaching at the tailbone, these muscles literally form the floor of the pelvis

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

Pelvic floor dysfunction is the underlying cause of many common - but not 'normal' - problems with pelvic health. In fact, more than half of us will deal with pelvic floor issues at some point in our lives.

Risk factors for pelvic floor dysfunction include a fall on the tailbone (even in childhood), pelvic or abdominal surgeries, a history of low back or hip pain, trauma to the region, and pregnancy.

See the next page for common symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction, and how they can be resolved and prevented.



PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTION

COMMON ISSUES THAT CAN OCCUR WHEN THE PELVIC FLOOR IS NOT FUNCTIONING PROPERLY

PELVIC PAIN

Dysfunction in the pelvic floor can irritate the pelvic nerves and cause pain anywhere that they run. Pain can manifest within the pelvis itself, below the belly button, in the tailbone, or anywhere else within the pelvic girdle.

URINARY SYMPTOMS

Issues with urination are often caused by underlying pelvic floor dysfunction. Incontinence is any involuntary loss of urine, indicating the pelvic floor is unable to hold back the flow. The pelvic floor can also cause urinary urgency and/or frequency, pain with urination, recurring UTIs, and make it difficult to start or maintain a stream.

ORTHOPEDIC PAIN

Pain in the low back, hips, groin, or tailbone often involves or originates in the muscles of the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor helps stabilize the low back and hips, and all pelvic floor muscles attach at the tailbone. Often the pelvic floor is the missing piece in the treatment of chronic orthopedic pain.

PROLAPSE

Prolapse occurs when the pelvic floor is unable to properly support the pelvic organs. The pelvic organs begin slipping down, and can bulge into the vagina (in women) or rectum (both genders).

GI & BOWEL SYMPTOMS

The pelvic floor controls elimination, and is often a contributing factor to bowel dysfunction like constipation and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Fecal incontinence, pain with bowel movements, or having to strain to use the bathroom are also signs of pelvic floor dysfunction.

SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION

Sexual function in both women and men is controlled by the pelvic floor, and is often the cause of sexual dysfunction or pain with intercourse. In women this commonly manifests as pain with penetration or pain after sexual activity, while in men it can cause erectile dysfunction or pain with erection or ejaculation. Sexual activity often flares other symptoms as well.

The good news is that each of these symptoms can be resolved with pelvic floor physical therapy (PT). Pelvic PT works to alleviate trigger points in the pelvic floor, restore normal function, and address the underlying cause to prevent symptoms from recurring.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

www.PelvicSanity.com

Online Facebook Support Group - Finding Pelvic Sanity