

# Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy for Men

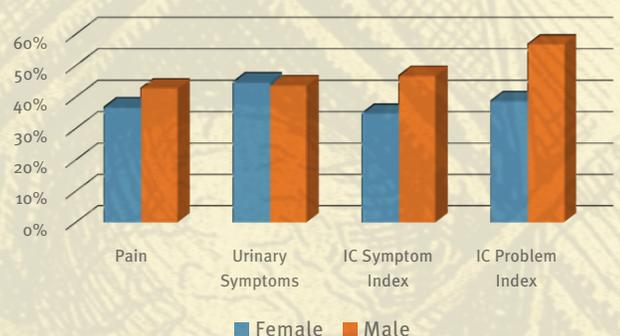
**Men with IC also can benefit from physical therapy. Here's how to find the right provider.**

By Nicole Cozean, PT, DPT, WCS, CSCS

Pelvic floor physical therapy can help address the pelvic floor component of IC symptoms—present in at least 80 percent of patients. It also can work equally well for men and women.

In general, researchers have not found many differences in the way men and women respond to IC treatments, and pelvic floor physical therapy is no exception. In fact, some results showed that male patients actually responded slightly better than females with physical therapy. In perhaps the most important result, men with IC symptoms reported a 40 percent improvement in their overall quality of life with pelvic floor physical therapy (see chart at right).

Improvement with 12 Weeks of PT



Anatomically, there is very little difference between the pelvic floor musculature of men and women. The same muscles, ligaments, and nerves are found in both sexes. While some symptoms may manifest differently—for example, a man may experience testicular or penile pain with intercourse, while women experience pain with entry or deep vaginal pain—the underlying mechanism is the same. Releasing pelvic floor trigger points, removing inflammation, and restoring muscles to their natural length works just as well in men as women.

## Finding a Physical Therapist Who Treats Men

Unfortunately, finding a qualified pelvic floor physical therapist can be difficult. There are fewer than 300 board-certified experts across the country. These are the physical therapists that have spent at least two years treating pelvic patients full-time, have passed a comprehensive specialty test, and written a case report on a specific pelvic patient that has been evaluated. But even the name of these physical therapists—Women’s Clinical Specialists (WCS)—can be daunting to men. Not to worry—these specialists are often trained to treat men as well, and the field is looking into a more gender-neutral term for these experts.

Still, many therapists don’t have much experience treating men, or feel more comfortable with female patients. This can lead to less internal work, which is a crucial piece of the treatment puzzle.

As a man, your best bet is to still find a WCS-certified expert in the field. There is a searchable database of WCS professionals on the American Physical Therapy Association website, or you can Google “Find a WCS Therapist” to be taken to the site. The ICA has a ‘Find a Provider’ section on its website, and you can also search the International Pelvic Pain Society’s site for providers near you.

Not everyone will have a board-certified WCS therapist in their area, and there are some excellent pelvic floor physical therapists who aren’t yet board-certified. Be sure to find a therapist who is comfortable treating pelvic pain conditions (as opposed to pregnancy or incontinence), who has taken courses in the male pelvic floor, and who treats male patients regularly.

When you do find a therapist in your area and it looks like they have experience in treating chronic pelvic pain conditions like IC, there are a few questions you should ask before scheduling an appointment to ensure that they have the experience necessary to help male patients:

**Q: Do you treat male pelvic pain at this clinic?**

The answer should be quickly and without hesitation, “Yes!”

**Q: What is the percentage of male pelvic floor patients that this clinic treats?**

This is a great question to help get a sense of whether men make up a sizeable part of the practice. For example, at PelvicSanity, 30 percent of our patients are men. That may be a bit higher than many other pelvic floor clinics, but you don’t want to get an answer like “every once in a while” or “a few.”

**Q: Has the therapist taken specific courses in male pelvic pain or male pelvic floor conditions?**

Never be afraid to ask your medical professionals about their education or experience—a qualified physical therapist will be glad that you asked and happy to share their education with you. You definitely want to hear that they’ve taken a course specifically for men.

**Q: How long is the appointment, and will I be able to get internal and external manual therapy at every visit?**

A: Pelvic pain conditions are much more complex than most physical therapy treatments and require more time to be spent with each patient. I always advise patients to be looking for at least a 45-minute appointment that

“ Researchers have not found many differences in the way men and women respond to IC treatments, and pelvic floor physical therapy is no exception. In fact, some results showed that male patients actually responded slightly better than females with physical therapy. ”

## IC vs. CP in Men

Until recently, most physicians believed IC to be a condition that primarily affected women. However, the latest research now shows that IC is almost as prevalent in men as it is women, affecting approximately 4 million men in the United States (4.6 percent of the population).

Because they believed IC to be rare in men, urologists often diagnosed chronic prostatitis (CP) instead. Many researchers now believe the two conditions to be either identical or very closely related. The symptoms, onset, food sensitivities, and treatments are nearly identical between the conditions. One study found that up to 92 percent of men with these symptoms could be diagnosed with interstitial cystitis rather than chronic prostatitis.

Regardless of the name, the practical implications are clear—pelvic floor physical therapy can benefit both interstitial cystitis and chronic prostatitis patients.

“

Despite the name of their physical therapy credential, Women’s Clinical Specialists (WCS) are often trained to treat men as well, and the field is looking into a more gender-neutral term for these experts.

”

allows the therapist to address both the internal and external muscles.

For both men and women with IC, pelvic floor physical therapy can be an important part of a holistic treatment plan to help them heal. For men, it’s certainly worth taking the time to find a therapist who is trained in treating male patients, and one that you feel comfortable with.

*Nicole Cozean, PT, DPT, WCS, CSCS is owner of PelvicSanity in Orange County, California, and author of The Interstitial Cystitis Solution.*

