

PELVIC FLOOR PHYSIOTHERAPY

Introduction

Pelvic Floor problems among women are very common, though many women just accept this as a normal part of life. It doesn't have to be - treatment is available. Specialist, Chartered Physiotherapists are often the first line of treatment. Many people are unaware that physiotherapy can help these problems but there is a lot we can do to help. Most conditions can be treated effectively and symptoms eased in the majority of cases.

This leaflet explains what will happen to you when you are referred for pelvic floor physiotherapy and the treatments that may be suggested. The physiotherapist will discuss with you in detail, the procedure, the benefits, risks and any available alternative treatments (including no treatment). They will answer any questions or concerns and will keep you informed throughout. You will be involved in any decisions made about your treatment.

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a sling of muscles deep within the pelvis that are very important in controlling the bladder and bowel and also support the pelvic organs. Incontinence and prolapse may occur when the pelvic floor muscles are weak.

Assessment

Your first appointment will include an assessment of your problem by a female physiotherapist. This takes place in a private treatment room with a closed door where women feel more at ease when talking about a personal problem. You will be asked in detail about your problem and how it affects your everyday life and also about your medical history.

Will I need to bring anything with me?

You don't need to wear any special clothing e.g. a tracksuit. It is helpful to bring a list of any current medication that you are taking. Following the assessment and agreement on course of action, you will need to arrange future appointments.

Many women lead very busy lives therefore please ensure you know any dates when you will not be available

Vaginal examination

As pelvic floor exercises are an essential part of the treatment for pelvic floor problems, it is important for both you and your physiotherapist to know that you are exercising the muscles in the correct way. We can find this out by performing a vaginal examination. (This is sometimes known as an “internal” or “intimate” examination) By putting a finger into the vagina, it is possible to feel the vaginal walls near the bladder and the rectum and to test the power of your pelvic floor muscles. This provides very useful information about the support of your pelvic organs and the strength of your muscles. This sort of examination also helps your physiotherapist to assess whether or not it may be necessary to include other treatment options.

Consent for a vaginal examination

We need your permission (or “consent”) before we can do this examination. You may like to bring a friend or family member with you for support. If you do not want to be examined, then it is your right to say “no”. You can change your mind even after you have given consent, however an important marker to assess the effectiveness of treatment will be missing.

What happens after the examination?

The physiotherapist will discuss the results of the examination with you. Using all the information gained from the questions and vaginal examination, we can discuss your treatment options and agree upon a course of action designed for your individual needs.

What treatments are available?

It may be necessary to include some, or all, of the treatments listed below:

1. Pelvic floor exercise regime - the majority of people will be given pelvic floor exercises as the first line of treatment. These can be very effective but need to be done regularly over a period of months. Therefore they require persistence and commitment.
2. Life-style changes e.g. altering your drinking habits, possible weight loss, dietary advice to prevent constipation. These factors can aggravate pelvic floor problems and it may be appropriate to focus on some of them.

3. Electrical stimulation - when pelvic floor muscles are very weak or your awareness of them is poor, it may be necessary to consider this to help you identify the muscles correctly.
4. Biofeedback - this is a way of increasing your awareness of the pelvic floor muscles by providing an electrical trace of your muscle contraction on a computer screen.
5. Vaginal cones (weights) - these are similar to a tampon in shape but are weighted. They provide a means of “weight training” for the pelvic floor.

You have a right to refuse any aspect of your treatment at any time.

Throughout your treatment you will be re-assessed to make sure everything is going to plan. Repeat vaginal examinations are only performed when needed and with your consent.

We're here to help

As you can see, there is a lot physiotherapy can do to help. **PLEASE** don't suffer in silence.

Women's Health Physiotherapy Team:

DRI: 01302 553135

Bassetlaw: 01909 502302

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS staff are available to offer advice or information on healthcare matters. The office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email. PALS staff can also visit inpatients on all Trust sites.

The contact details are:

Tel: 01302 553140 or freephone 0800 028 8059

Minicom (Text talk) 01302 553140

E-mail: pals.dbh@dbh.nhs.uk

Information and letters are available in alternative formats and languages. If you require this service please speak to a member of staff.