

**“A holistic approach to improving Pelvic Floor Dysfunction: a look at the complex of the anatomy, multiple functions of the pelvic region and determining/treating the underlying cause of pelvic pain/dysfunction.”**

**Presented by Gina Meyer, DPT**

**What is pelvic floor dysfunction?** The pelvic floor is made up of muscles and other tissues that form a sling from the pubic bone to the tailbone. They assist in maintaining upright posture, supporting abdominal and pelvic organs, and help to control bladder, bowel and sexual activity. When these muscles are stressed, overactive, or overused, the result can be pain and decreased function in any of these areas.

Pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD) refers to a wide range of problems that occur when the muscles of the pelvic floor are not functioning normally because they are too tight/weak, often resulting in the inability to correctly contract (tighten) and relax. There are also often related impairments of the sacroiliac joint, low back, coccyx and/or hip joint that accompany this condition and can contribute to pain and loss of function.

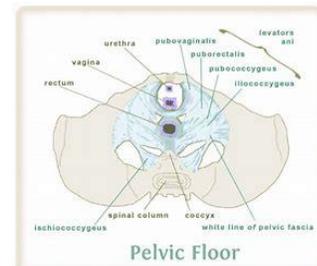
Due to the complexity of the anatomy and multiple functions of the pelvic region, determining the underlying cause of pelvic pain is a complex process and the entire body must be treated holistically to resolve symptoms.

**A woman with Pelvic Floor Dysfunction may experience any number of the following symptoms:**

- Frequent urination or waking at night to urinate
- Urgency to urinate or a sense you can't make it to the bathroom in time
- Urinary leaking
- Pain with gynecological exams or intimacy
- Pressure or bulging sensations in the vagina or a feeling that body tissue is falling out
- Body pains during or after pregnancy
- Feeling weak through the midsection
- Painful scars from caesarian-section or episiotomy/tearing during childbirth
- Abdominal weakness after childbirth/caesarian-section
- Low back or pelvic or hip pain

**What are the causes of Pelvic Floor Dysfunction?**

Most frequently, PFD is often caused by the stress of pregnancy/vaginal childbirth and/or chronic constipation and/or being overweight. Other studies point to learned behavior that causes these muscles to coordinate their activities incorrectly. Other causes include having weak connective tissues that predispose women to pelvic organ prolapse, including deficiencies in collagen, treatment of gynecological cancers, and menopause.



**Treatment of Pelvic Floor dysfunction:** The best treatment utilizes a holistic full body approach that includes the pelvic floor muscles and the core muscles (transverse abdominals). A few simple guidelines can help you manage your pelvic floor dysfunction in a safe manner and promote long term success.

1. Train your transverse abdominal muscle. This muscle provides functionality. When training this key abdominal muscle also perform a low level kegel at 30% effort. Perform this combo exercise in different positions such as all fours, in planks, etc.
2. Don't hold your breath because it negatively affects the pelvic floor muscles. Practice diaphragmatic breathing (ribcage should expand).
3. Don't forcefully pull in your abdominal muscles (which can actually cause organs to prolapse into your vagina because a forceful inward pull creates a downward piston effect on your organs and pushes them out of place and into your pelvic floor).
4. You may benefit from a customized pelvic health program that includes Kegels and reverse Kegels. Depending on your symptoms, this will determine whether you should pursue Kegels or Reverse Kegels or a combination of both (which is most likely).
5. If you have recently had a baby, you may want to try massaging your abdominals to release restrictions and any trigger points you find in these muscles.
6. If you have had a caesarian, address the scar tissue as well. Seek help from a trained physical therapist if needed.
7. Avoid traditional crunches, instead use a more functional approach to training your core.
8. Posture control is very important, avoid slump sitting and forward head posture. Make sure to align your pelvic bones. Pay close attention to your standing posture as well.

### **What is a Reverse Kegel?**

A reverse Kegel is an extending exercise that teaches you how to relax the PC and pelvic floor muscles. Unsure of what your PC muscle is? Kegel exercises are designed for strengthening of the PC (pubococcygeus) muscle. The PC muscle is a hammock-like muscle that is found in both women and men. It stretches from the pubic bone to the tailbone. The PC muscle provides a support system for all of the pelvic organs. It also controls urine flow. Many people use the term 'PC muscle' interchangeably with 'pelvic floor muscles'. In actuality, the PC muscle is a separate, unique muscle. When it has been trained correctly, it will leave you feeling strong and empowered. Once you have learned to isolate and strengthen your PC muscle, the next step is figuring out how to control that strength and relax that muscle. Many of us carry tension in our bodies without even realizing it, so relaxation sometimes takes work. Even so, traditional Kegels can make it easier to perform reverse Kegels. The stronger your muscles, the more control you'll have when it comes time to relax.

### **How Can a Physical Therapist Help?**

Physical therapy is a very effective way to manage symptoms and improve functional capacity. Given the complexity of the pelvic floor, a physical therapist can assess your unique symptoms and perform treatment/ make recommendations based on the underlying cause of your dysfunction- each case is unique!

*We offer free screenings and would be happy to assess your unique body and symptoms! We also offer highly specialized manual therapy and sports medicine. Our goal is to help all of you Mommas out there stay strong and healthy so that you can enjoy motherhood and live a vibrant life! **Call today to schedule: 818-318-2430***