

Patient Information Leaflet Pelvic Floor Muscle Treatment

This leaflet explains the treatments which may be suggested by your physiotherapist, and will be discussed with you in detail. The procedure, benefits, risks and any available alternative treatments (including no treatment) will be covered. Any questions or concerns will be addressed and you will be kept informed throughout.

All treatments will be carried out by a specialist chartered physiotherapist; the physiotherapist and patient have the right to request the presence of a chaperone. Patients have the right to refuse any aspect of treatment at any time.

Assessment

Your first appointment will include a thorough assessment of your problem. You will be questioned on your medical history. If some of the questions seem irrelevant your physiotherapist will explain the significance of these. The more information obtained about your problem the easier it is to plan an effective course of treatment in consultation with you.

Vaginal/rectal examination

The pelvic floor muscles give us control of bladder and bowel and provide support for the pelvic organs. As treatment invariably involves pelvic floor muscle exercises, the performance of a vaginal or rectal examination, as appropriate, achieves several important objectives. Firstly, statistically fewer than 50% of women are able to perform pelvic floor muscle exercises correctly or optimally if given only written or verbal information (Bump et al '91). It is important, therefore, for both you and your physiotherapist to know that you are exercising in the correct way. Secondly, it enables the exercise programme to be tailored individually, so that it is appropriate for your specific muscle strength and endurance. The exercise regime is progressed as muscle function improves.

Examination also enables the physiotherapist to assess whether or not the inclusion of other means of treatment may be helpful – thus assisting in the development of your treatment plan.

Pelvic floor muscle exercise programme

Your treatment will be based on a programme of exercise designed uniquely for you. The aim of the programme will be to improve strength, endurance and function. It will be necessary to work the muscles to their full potential and then progress the programme.

It will take about 4 months for the muscles to increase in strength and improve function and you will need to make a commitment to do the exercises regularly each day as advised by your physiotherapist.

Biofeedback

Many people have little awareness of their pelvic floor muscles and biofeedback is a means of increasing the ability to exercise these muscles correctly. A pressure probe or electrode is inserted into the vagina/rectum and linked to the biofeedback unit and screen. This may be a small home system or a larger, clinic based system. The pelvic floor muscles surround the vagina/rectum and when they contract an increase in pressure or electrical activity will occur. This is relayed to the screen and will give immediate, visible information about pelvic floor muscle activity which reinforces the learning process. The pelvic floor muscle contraction can then be modified and improved. Biofeedback may be used regularly as part of a progressive exercise programme.

There are no electrical impulses passing from the biofeedback unit to the patient – it is simply a recording of muscle activity.

Contraindications to, and Precautions for Biofeedback

There are no risks attached to the treatment.

Care should be taken in the following situations

1. Pregnancy
2. Local infection
3. Vaginal or urinary tract infection
4. Significant prolapse and during menstruation according to patient's wishes and comfort.

Electrical Stimulation

This is used as an addition to, but not instead of, pelvic floor exercises. It can be valuable where there is significant muscle weakness or little sensation of a pelvic floor muscle contraction. It involves the use of a vaginal/rectal probe to deliver the stimulation. It is not painful and there are few side effects. These can include

1. A temporary sensation of slight fullness or heaviness in the abdomen or lower back following treatment. This occurs because electrical stimulation increases the circulation to the pelvic area. This is a beneficial effect as a better blood supply to the tissues improves their condition and function. This is nothing to be concerned about and usually settles within hours.
2. Some tiredness may be experienced after treatment. If so it is suggested that you avoid excessive physical activity for two or three hours following your treatment session. There are no problems with normal activity.
3. Electrical stimulation may lower blood pressure slightly for a brief period.

Contraindications to, and Precautions for Electrical Stimulation

This treatment should not be performed in the following circumstances:

1. Pregnancy
2. Vaginal infection
3. Diagnosis of pelvic cancer
4. Poor skin condition in the area of treatment
5. Risk of heavy bleeding e.g. menstruation
6. If you do not wish to undergo or understand the treatment

Care should be taken in the presence of severe prolapse.

Vaginal cones

A vaginal cone is similar to a tampon in shape and comes in different graded weights and sizes. The cone is inserted into the vagina with the maximum weight which can be held for a minute. The aim is to retain it while performing light activities for increasing periods of time up to 15 minutes once or twice a day. When this is achieved activity may be increased to include things such as coughing or climbing stairs while retaining the cone. As pelvic floor muscles strengthen the weight can be increased thus progressing the exercise by adding greater resistance. Cones may be suggested as part of a treatment programme.

Contraindications to the use of vaginal cones

Cones should not be used

1. If significant prolapse is present

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2. During a period
3. During or after intercourse
4. During pregnancy
5. When vaginal or urinary infection is present

Cones are for single patient use and should not be borrowed from or lent to anyone else.