

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy Frequently Asked Questions

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WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles, ligaments, and tendons that form a hammock or “floor” on the bottom of the bony pelvis. The pelvic floor assists in supporting the pelvic organs, assists in stabilizing the spine and pelvis, and plays a role in bowel, bladder, and sexual function.

WHAT IS PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTION AND WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SYMPTOMS?

Pelvic floor dysfunction is when your pelvic floor muscles are not functioning properly. The pelvic floor muscles should be able to contract, relax, and lengthen. Oftentimes, due to chronic pain in the endometriosis population, the muscles develop a “holding pattern” meaning that they have become accustomed to being tense and guarded. Common symptoms of a tense pelvic floor include low back pain, abdominal pain, pelvic pain, pain with sex, urinary urgency and frequency, bladder leakage, constipation, bloating, and more!

HOW DO I KNOW IF PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPY IS RIGHT FOR ME?

A lot of symptoms associated with endometriosis are similar to symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction. If you are having low back, abdominal, or pelvic pain, bladder symptoms, bowel symptoms, or pain with sex seeing a pelvic floor therapist could help manage some or all of your symptoms. Also, if you are planning on having a surgery, a pelvic floor therapist can help with surgery prep and post op recovery.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AT MY FIRST PELVIC FLOOR THERAPY SESSION?

We want to hear your story, all of it! One thing that stands out about pelvic floor physical therapists is we take the time to listen. Expect a lot of your first session to be you talking about your symptoms and your history and us asking a lot of questions. We will then perform an examination assessing the whole body. Part of the examination may include a pelvic exam to assess the pelvic floor muscles. This is an external and internal assessment that your therapist will explain and ask for consent prior to beginning. It is common to be a little nervous coming in for your first pelvic floor therapy appointment. Your therapist will work with you to make you feel comfortable.

DO I HAVE TO HAVE INTERNAL THERAPY?

Although internal therapy can be helpful in assessing and treating pelvic floor dysfunction it is not absolutely necessary. If you are uncomfortable with a pelvic exam, let your therapist know. There are plenty of ways to work around this. Also it is important to note that the pelvic floor does not work in isolation. There are many external techniques and exercises that affect the pelvic floor.

WHEN WILL I START TO SEE RESULTS WITH PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPY?

This depends, but a general rule of thumb is you should start to see some improvement within 4-6 treatment sessions (consistency with your custom home exercise program is important!) . If there has been no improvement in symptoms your therapist can reassess you at that time and either change the course of treatment or discuss other options.

HOW CAN I FIND A PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPIST WHO KNOWS HOW TO TREAT ENDOMETRIOSIS?

Unfortunately, a database does not exist of pelvic floor therapists who are well versed in endometriosis. You can search for a trained pelvic floor PT in your location by visiting <https://pelvicrehab.com> or <https://apta.pelvichealth.org>. I recommend

calling the pelvic floor therapist of interest and ‘interviewing’ them. Ask about their experience treating patients with endometriosis. If you have pain symptoms, make sure they have a good understanding of pain science. Have a conversation! Any good therapist will be willing to take 5 minutes out of their day to speak with you and answer your questions.

DO ALL PEOPLE WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS HAVE PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTION?

No! If you have endometriosis it does not necessarily mean you have pelvic floor dysfunction. However, a pelvic floor physical therapist can still play an important role in your care. Endometriosis is a whole body disease and pelvic floor therapists assess and treat the whole body. If you’ve been in pain for a long time you may have developed compensatory strategies. A pelvic floor therapist can help you to unlearn these faulty patterns. Physical therapy can also help to regulate your nervous system, can help with scar tissue management, can help with surgical and planning and recovery, and so much more!

HOW LONG WILL I HAVE TO DO PELVIC FLOOR THERAPY?

It depends. Every person is different. Often, endometriosis is associated with pain symptoms that have been occurring for many years. In this case a person may need therapy for a longer period of time. It is not uncommon to see a pelvic floor therapist on and off over time. It is best to consult with a therapist who will create an individualized program for you and will give you a better understanding of your course of treatment.

WHAT ELSE CAN A PELVIC FLOOR THERAPIST HELP WITH?

So much! Pelvic floor therapists do not just treat your pelvic floor, we assess and treat the whole body. A good pelvic floor therapist who understands endometriosis will talk to you about lifestyle changes, nutrition (within our scope), bowel and bladder retraining, sleep hygiene, and so much more! A pelvic floor therapist can also play an integral part of your healing by helping you to build your medical ‘dream team’ and referring you to the right people.