Overactive Bladder and the Role of the Pelvic Floor Muscles

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What Are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?

Our pelvic floor muscles are capable of wonderful things. At the bottom of your pelvis, there are a complex layer of muscles that support your pelvic organs and your abdominal organs above them.

These muscles are responsible for many functions, one main one being bladder and bowel control. They hold your urethral sphincter and anal sphincter shut during the times when you're not using the toilet. When you are ready to go, they relax and allow for you to void your bladder and bowels.

When these muscles aren't functioning correctly, they can cause a lot of distress and discomfort in our lives.

Common Pelvic Floor Muscle Myths

For many people, exercises associated with the pelvic floor muscles are only meant for a select group of people and that these exercises do not work or are easy to do. It's time to bust these myths!

Kegels and Pelvic Floor Exercises Are Only for Childbearing Women

There are many myths that need debunking. One of the more common myths about pelvic floor muscles are that they are only for women, specifically childbearing women. This is false because every human being has these muscles, whether they are working properly or not.

While recommended for a woman who is either expecting or after childbirth to perform Kegels or pelvic floor exercises, these are exercises that everyone can do. You can do them at any stage in your life, and they are super important for women who have just given birth to regain strength and sensitivity down there.

Pelvic Floor Exercises Don't Actually Work

It takes time and practice every day to benefit from pelvic floor exercises. Just like any exercise, you will not see improvement overnight. However, with infection, inflammation, or undiagnosed bowel disease, pelvic floor exercises will not help, work, or fix those problems. So, it may appear that they are not working, when in fact they are being disguised by another issue.

Pelvic Floor Exercises Are Easy to Do and Learn

Most people need someone to help teach them how to do it vs. reading it in a pamphlet or online. Because they are not really all that easy. If you have received the wrong steps while learning them, then you might be practicing them wrong and either receiving no benefit or causing other issues.

One thing you must not do is practice them while on the toilet. It is good to know how to stop the stream of urine,

but it is not the place to perform them exclusively.

The Benefits of Healthy Pelvic Floor Muscles

As mentioned before, these muscles are capable of many things that we may take for granted. They act like a trampoline. They move up and down and are quite flexible, firm and thick. These muscles have a huge job of holding up our organs, as well as allowing passages for our body to void through, and help with sexual functions in both men and women.

For men, these muscles help them with erectile function, as well as ejaculation. Weak pelvic floor muscles may be a key factor in erectile dysfunction, so it is worth knowing how to find your pelvic floor muscles. For women, contracting your muscles voluntarily will aid in arousal and sexual sensation. Squeezing these muscles can make sex more enjoyable.

The pelvic floor muscles also provide support for pregnant women and their baby. As much as the baby is pushing on their pelvic floor organs, especially the bladder, a strong pelvic floor will help with stress incontinence, more so than not having done any pelvic floor exercises. They also help during the childbirth process.

Your abdominal muscles and back muscles work with your pelvic floor muscles to support and stabilize your spine. Good posture will exercise all these muscles together to help alleviate lower back pain.

OAB and the Pelvic Floor Muscles

More importantly, in OAB sufferers, pelvic floor muscles are crucial. Urge incontinence is one of the symptoms of OAB and is the symptom that is mostly impacted by weak pelvic floor muscles.

When you have OAB, and you suffer from urgency when your bladder is halfway full, and also frequency when your bladder is sending signals to your brain that it needs to go 15 minutes apart, one of the last things that you also want to suffer from is urge incontinence.

Sometimes it happens to people who don’t suffer from OAB. However, this is not a normal thing we as humans all endure. It usually is a result from a weak pelvic floor, and we should be exercising it to strengthen its “holding” ability, in keeping our passages closed.

You will suffer from fewer urge incontinent episodes when your pelvic floor muscles are engaged and strong.

What's Next for Your Pelvic Floor Muscles?

With all of these important functions that our pelvic floor muscles do for us every day, it is hard to believe that most of the population does not practice in making these muscles stronger.

As we age, we can lose strength in these muscles. Other than the natural aging process, pregnancy, chronic coughing, straining too hard on the toilet, repetitive heavy lifting and obesity are other reasons our pelvic floor muscles might become weaker.

These little muscles have such a huge impact on our lives, that it’s more important than ever to treat them well. Fortunately, we do not need any equipment or a gym membership to work out these muscles. There are just a few simple movements a day that can help retrain these muscles to work better, and in turn, will help you work better.