

Things Everyone Should Know About Their Bodies “Down There”

Marie Pielage, PT ¹

As a Physical Therapist specializing in pelvic floor rehabilitation, I am struck by the number of times patients tell me, “Wow! I wish I would have known about this years ago!” Knowledge about how our bodies work, or how to know that they are not working quite right, gives us the power to seek help and improve our quality of life. We don’t tend to talk about the functions of the pelvic floor because many of them are so personal and private, but when there is a problem, it can cause a lot of distress.

First of all, what the heck is the pelvic floor? It is the bowl shaped group of muscles that sits at the bottom of your torso and is key in bowel, bladder, and reproductive function. Here are some things everyone needs to know about how the pelvic floor should be working:

1. First, it is not normal to have urine leaks, even when coughing or sneezing, or doing impact activities such as running or jumping. This is true no matter what your age, and regardless of whether or not you have had children. It is a common problem, and can be helped by doing Kegel exercises in order to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. If you have tried doing this exercise on your own and it has not helped, you are probably not doing it correctly and would benefit from physical therapy to learn the proper technique. Studies show that about fifty percent of people perform Kegel exercises incorrectly with just verbal or written instruction. This exercise also helps with bowel leakage, which is less common.

2. Another thing people are usually surprised to hear is how often we should be urinating. Ideally we should empty our bladders about every three to four hours during the day. It is normal to sleep through the night without waking to use the bathroom. If you find yourself going more often, waking at night to void, or feeling like you cannot “hold it,” then you have urinary urgency, also known as urinary frequency. You would benefit greatly from bladder training, which is a process to re-educate

your body to the proper volume and timing of urination. Conversely, when you need to go, you should be able to go. This means that if you feel the urge to urinate or have a bowel movement, you should be able to release and void.

“Wow!

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Sometimes our muscles get confused and tighten up when they should be relaxing. These muscles can also be retrained to function normally using physical therapy.

3. It is also very important to know that you should not be having pain in your pelvic floor with urination, bowel movement, sitting, or sexual activity. Sometimes this pain is felt in the lower abdomen. Again, each of these problems is not uncommon, but definitely not normal. Pain problems in the pelvis are most often due to spasm of the muscle, which can be helped and often resolved completely with physical therapy treatment.

If you have some “down there” problems, please know that there are trained healthcare professionals who can help you resolve them and improve your quality of life. Speak to your physician, get medically cleared, and ask for a referral to a pelvic floor physical therapist.

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