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# ***Pain With Sex: Women***

## ***Healing Through Awareness***

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# Body Harmony Physical Therapy, PLLC



Experts in Pelvic Health Physical Therapy & Wellness

We are a boutique physical therapy clinic in Downtown Manhattan specializing in pelvic rehabilitation for all age groups and genders.



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This e-book was created for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a health condition.





## Chapter 01

# Why Does Sex Hurt?



# Pain with Sex

Sex should never be painful, but for many people it is. **Dyspareunia**, or painful intercourse, can occur for a multitude of reasons. It could be a sign of a gynecologic condition such as ovarian cysts, endometriosis, or infection. Thus, it is important to consult your gynecologist to rule out gynecological pathology.

Pain with sex may have origins secondary to muscle imbalances, excessive muscular tone, nerve compression, fascial restrictions, adhesions and/or decreased blood or lymphatic flow.

Pain with sex can present in many ways including muscle spasms, burning, stinging, aching, throbbing, pins and needles, etc.

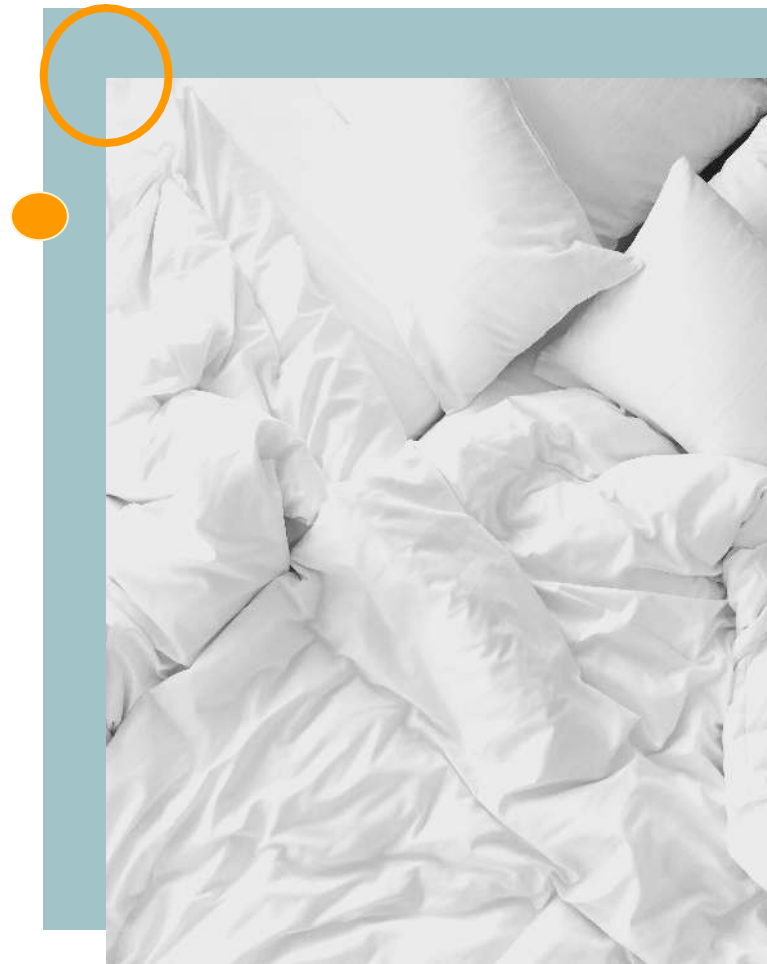
Symptoms may present in different areas:

- Lower Abdomen
- Bladder
- Vulvar vestibule
- Clitoris
- Vaginal opening
- Pelvic floor muscles
- Perineum
- Rectum/anus
- Tailbone
- Lower back
- Hips and/or upper thighs

You may experience superficial pain with light touch to the external genitalia or upon vaginal entry, or it may only be with deep penetration and thrusting.

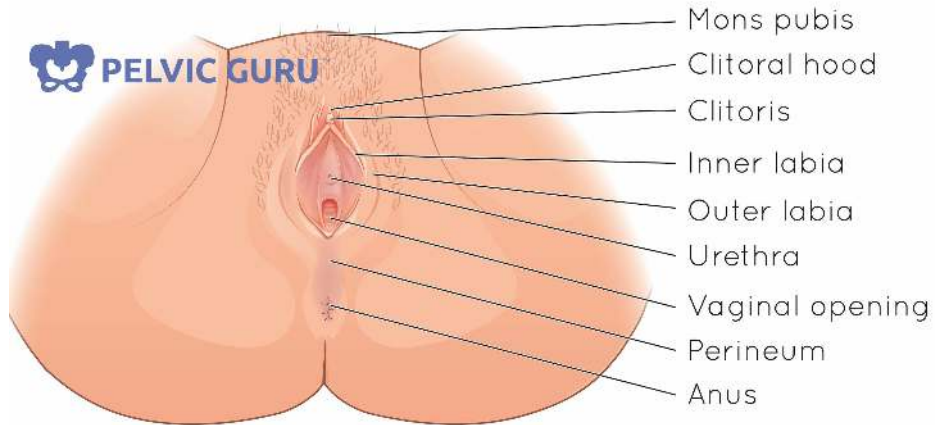
Maybe you always had pain with sex, and struggled with pelvic pain from the very first time you attempted to insert a tampon or with your first gynecological exam. Maybe you have had pleasurable sex for years and now things are not great.

In whatever way your pain presents, know that this is not how your body should normally respond to sex and there are things that you can do to take control over your sexual experience and manage or even completely eliminate your pain. You deserve to have pain-free, pleasurable sex and Body Harmony Physical Therapy is here to help!

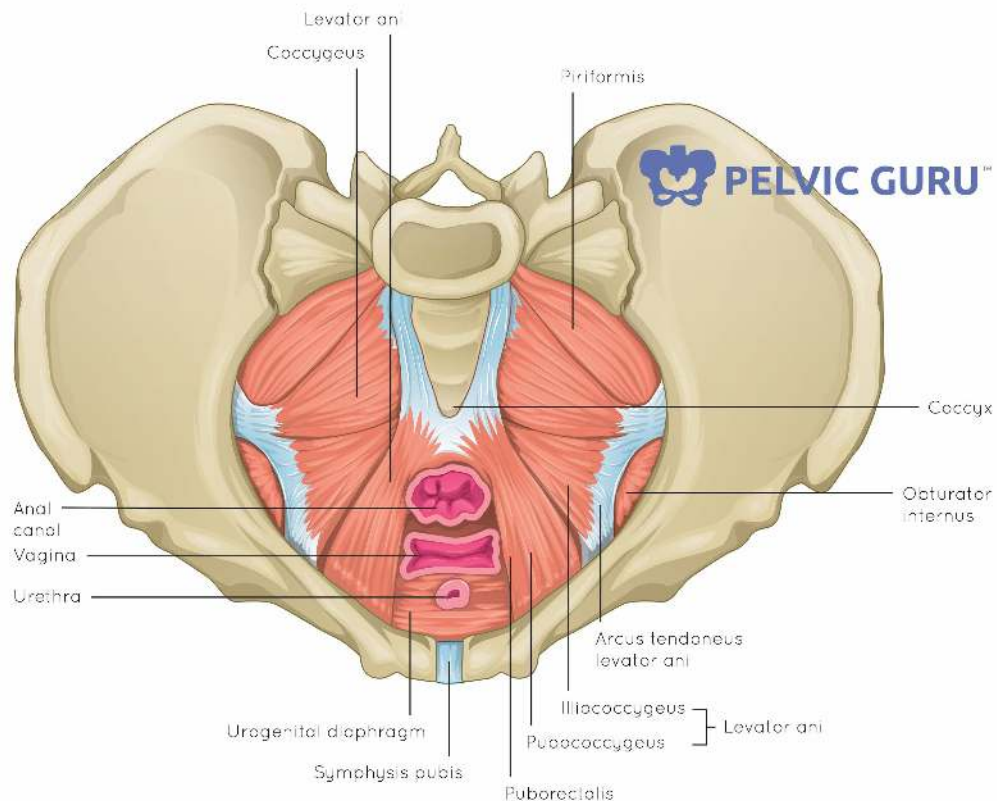


# Get to Know Your Anatomy

## Vulva



## Pelvic Floor





## CHAPTER 02

# Healing Begins with Self Care



# Stress: It's not just a feeling

Stress plays a huge role in our physical health and overall well-being. Understanding your body and how your daily habits can influence its processes can be a helpful tool in gaining control over your pain.

Our **autonomic nervous system**- the system responsible for regulating and maintaining the function of our bodily processes automatically without our conscious control- has two components:

1. The **sympathetic nervous system**: our “*fight or flight*” response that prepares us to operate in emergency or dangerous situations. It is responsible for physiological changes such as elevating our heart and respiratory rates, releasing stored energy, and shifting more blood towards our skeletal muscles, which are needed to protect/defend ourselves from external threats. It also slows down systems that aren't as important during those times, such as digestion and urination. (If a dog is chasing you, you don't want to stop to pee!)

2. The **parasympathetic nervous system**: our “rest and digest” response controls our ordinary bodily functioning. It is responsible for regulating physiological functions that allow our bodies to rest and restore energy, repair and heal, as well as build our immunity. It stimulates our digestive organs to breakdown food in order to absorb nutrients and eliminate waste. It also decreases our heart and respiratory rates during periods of rest to reduce excessive energy expenditure.

Of course, both of these components are necessary throughout our lifetime and allow us the flexibility to adapt to our surroundings and current situations. However, issues arise when we lack the appropriate balance between these systems and lose our ability to flexibly shift back and forth between these systems when necessary.

Maintaining a state of chronic stress due to work, family, finances can lead to more frequent sympathetic nervous system activation during times where our body doesn't need to respond to an external threat. This leads to excessive physical stress on our body as there is less energy going towards rest, restoration, and healing.



# Relaxation Techniques

So, how does stress and our autonomic nervous system tie into pain with sex? Individuals with pelvic pain tend to have elevated tone or tension of their muscles at rest and often experience increased difficulty with relaxing their pelvic floor muscles. They are also likely to report higher levels of anxiety and stress, lack efficient coping strategies, and demonstrate strong physiological responses to physical and emotional stress. Thus, it is key to learn and implement strategies to manage stress and physiologically quiet our nervous system to allow for relaxation to occur, when we want it to occur.



Here are a few relaxation techniques to try:

- **Relaxed deep breathing:** In any comfortable position, start to take deep, intentional breaths, allowing the rib cage to expand in all directions like a balloon filling up with air. Breathe in for 4 seconds, and out for 6-8 seconds. This lengthened exhale helps to down regulate your sympathetic nervous and tap into your parasympathetic nervous system to promote relaxation. Repeat for at least 5 breaths. You can do this with eyes open or eyes closed.
- **Meditation/Imagery:** In any comfortable position, close your eyes and take deep, calm breaths. If you want, combine this technique with the breathing described above. Begin to envision a time, place, or event that makes you feel safe, peaceful, and content. It could be a forest, a hammock on the beach, your grandmother's kitchen, in the arms of your partner, whatever feels best to you. Now visualize with all of your senses: what do you see, hear, smell, feel, taste?
- **Hand warming:** Imagine one of the following scenarios: you are holding a warm mug of tea, or holding your hands over the gentle warmth of a campfire, or curling your fingers into soft, warm sand. Now envision the warmest color you can think of slowly glowing brighter around your hands and wrists and say or think to yourself "My fingers are getting warmer; my palms are getting warmer; my wrists are getting warmer." This technique helps to reset your autonomic nervous system and promote feelings of calm and wellbeing by improving blood pressure, circulation, and pain response. Practice this for at least 30-60 seconds at a time.



# Relaxation Techniques

- **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is the conscious practice of being fully present in the moment and allowing ourselves to become aware of where we are, what we're doing, what's happening within our bodies, and not become overwhelmed by what's happening around us. Body scanning is a helpful technique that allows us to practice mindfulness within the context of body awareness and encourages relaxation in a systematic way. First, lay in a comfortable position and focus on the sensations of your breathing or your heart beat- don't try to change them, just become aware of them. Then, starting from your head, begin to notice the muscles of your face and jaw. How do they feel? Are they gripping or holding any tension? Slowly start to let go of each muscle by **picturing your body as warm, heavy, and relaxed.** Continue this body scanning process until you have relaxed each part of your body. Remain lying quietly for as long as you like.
- **Warm baths:** Can you think of a more ultimate home indulgence than being able to sink deep into a calm, warm bath? Heat helps to relax tight, sore muscles and relieve pain. Try adding 1-2 cups of epsom salt for extra relief! A warm bath can also promote a mental state of relaxation and decrease feelings of stress and anxiety.



- **“Me Time”:** Make time for something that brings you joy. We have to prioritize our mental and physical well-being. Block a slot on your calendar like you would for any other meeting or task that HAS TO BE DONE and treat it as such. You are a priority. Your health and well-being is a priority. Not only is it okay to put aside a little time for yourself, it is necessary.



# Take Care of Yourself

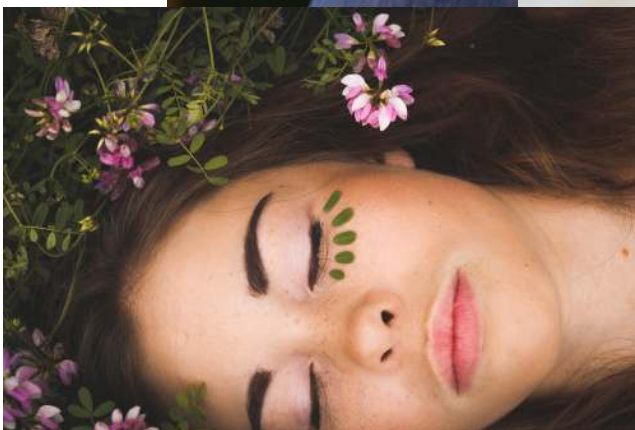
It is important to set aside a minimum of 5 minutes per day to practice the self care technique that works best for you to help your body better cope with stress.

It is important to note that practicing relaxation techniques and letting go of stress can sometimes lead to an emotional release. This can be different for each person. You may feel angry, anxious, sad, peaceful, joyful, or any other wide range of emotions. Simply try to notice your thoughts without judgement, and allow yourself to feel however it is that you are feeling in the moment. Be gentle with yourself.

Also, it may take time to find the technique or combination that works for you. Keep in mind, these techniques help some people, but they might not work for you. Please don't stress or feel that you've failed if these techniques do not end your pain. They are simply an option to explore. Talk to a pelvic floor PT to learn about other ways to manage your pain.



*“Sometimes the most important thing we do in a whole day is the rest between two breaths.”  
-Etty Helesum*



# Vulvar Care and Hygiene

## For a healthy vulva:

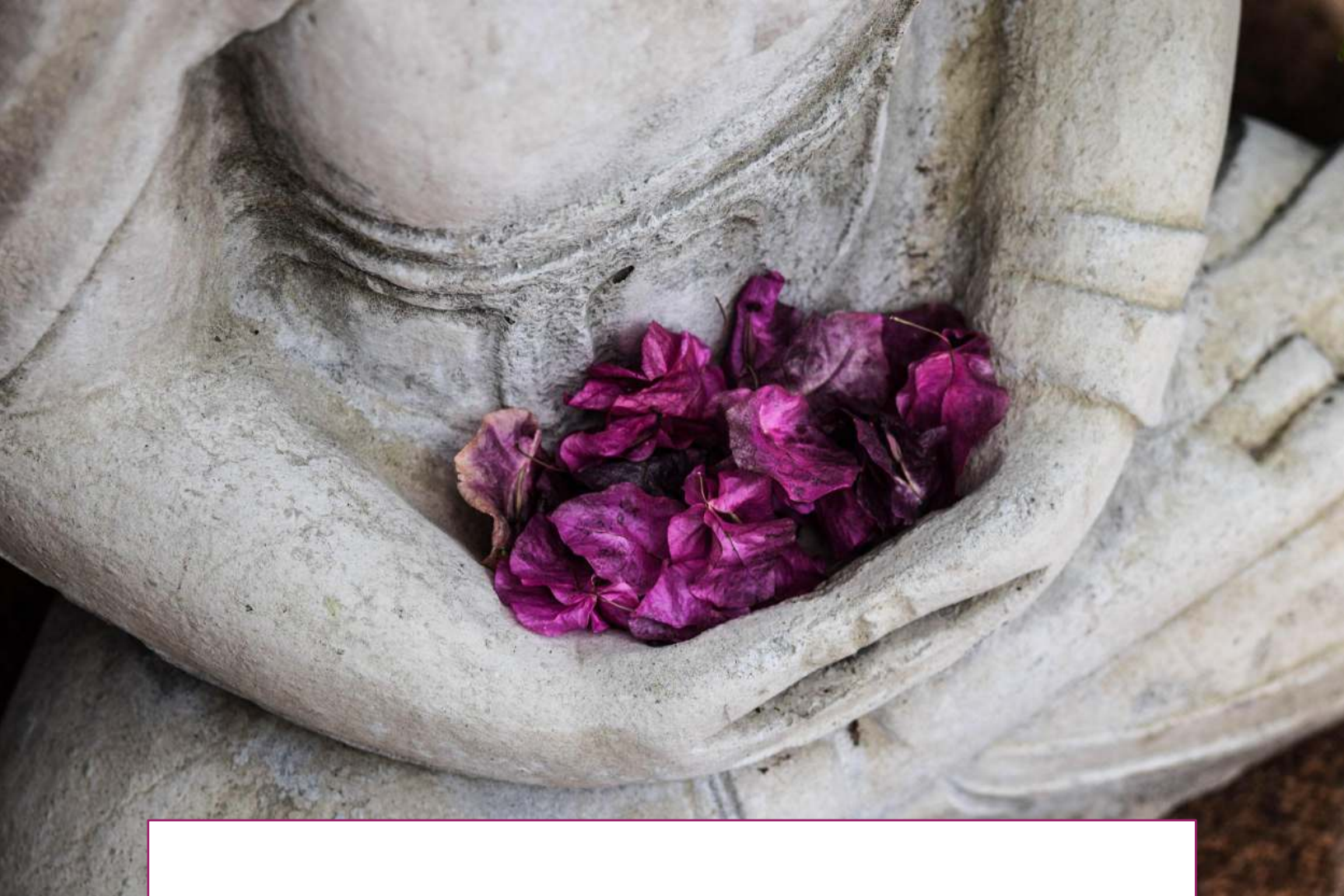
- Select **natural, breathable materials for undergarments** and feminine hygiene products, such as **cotton**.
- Wear **loose fitting** pants, shorts, or skirts.
- Wash clothing and bedding with **unscented detergents**. For sensitive, be sure to rinse twice.
- **Gently wash the vulva** (the external genitalia) **with lukewarm or cool water** using the fingertips. Pat dry as needed. No rubbing!
- Use **fragrance-free pH neutral soap** for washing your body.
- **Alternate periods of sitting with periods of standing or movement**. If you have a desk job, take regular standing breaks and be sure to use ergonomic seats and cushions.
- Focus on an **exercise routine that doesn't place pressure on the vulva**. Walking and/or running are better alternatives to cycling/biking.

## Be sure to Avoid:

- **Synthetic materials** for underwear, pantyhose and tights, menstrual products.
- Wearing **tight clothing** pants/jeans, swimsuits, leotards, thongs, or other lycra clothing for prolonged periods of time.
- Washing clothing and bedding with **scented detergents/fabric softeners**.
- Washing or cleaning out the vagina (the *inside*), aka douching. **The vagina is self-cleaning!** It doesn't need hot water, any soap/body wash, or scrubbing/use of washcloths.
- **Fragranced, harsh, or deodorant soaps** during a shower or bath.
- **Prolonged pressure on the vulva and perineum**. Switch out uncomfortable or poorly fitting chairs and avoid prolonged sitting on bicycle seats.
- **Highly chlorinated pools and hot tubs** as they can irritate sensitive vulvar skin.

Adapted from Kathe Wallace's "Vulvar Care and Best Hygiene Practices"





CHAPTER 03

# Connect to Your Breath



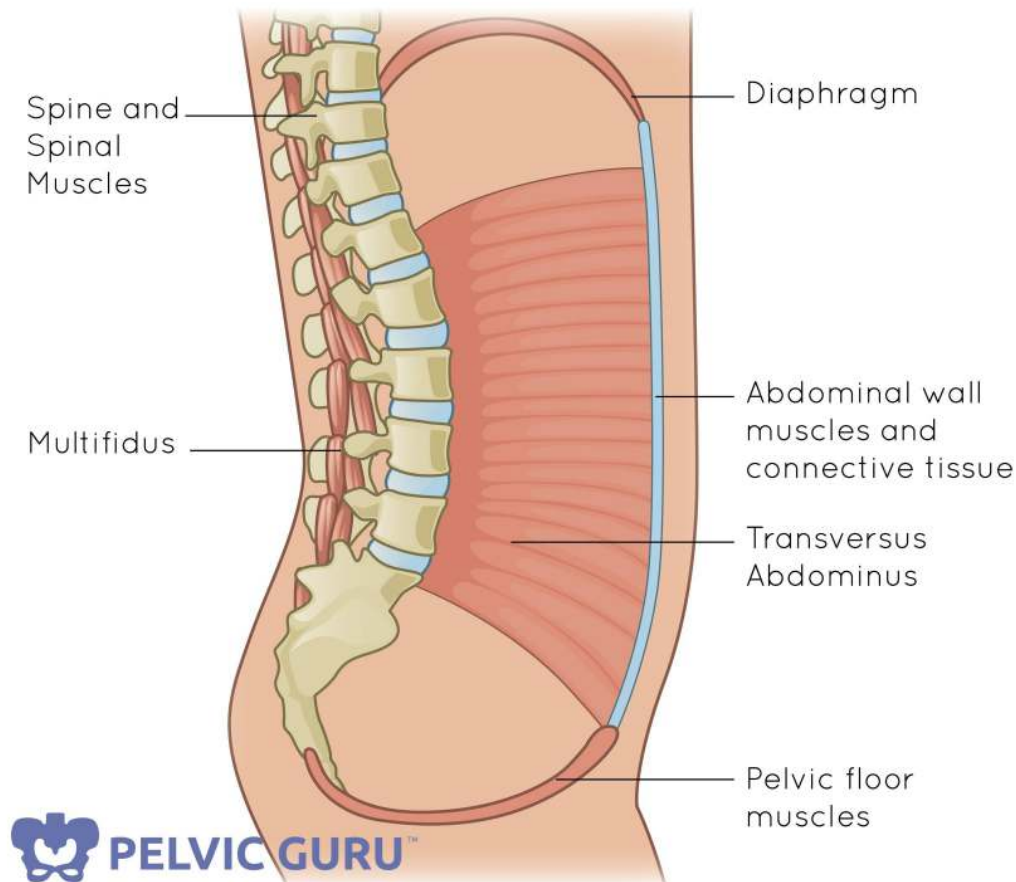
# Connection Between the Diaphragm and Pelvic Floor

This often comes as a shock to many people, but **your breath influences your pelvic floor**. How can that be???

The diaphragm, a broad, dome-shaped muscle at the base of your ribcage, is your primary muscle used in breathing. An intimate relationship exists between the diaphragm and the pelvic floor- they are each a component of **the core**. The core is the term commonly used to describe the group of musculature that forms a cylindrical pressure system that provides our trunk with stability.

The core consists of:

- The **diaphragm** and **vocal cords** at the top of the cylinder.
- The **pelvic floor muscles** at the bottom of the cylinder.
- The **transverse abdominus** and **multifidi** as the support walls of the cylinder.



# Connection Between the Diaphragm and Pelvic Floor

As integral parts of the core, the diaphragm and pelvic floor work together in coordination to provide stability and regulate the pressure inside of our trunk. To do this, the pelvic floor follows the movement of your diaphragm in a piston-like motion. But why?

As you breathe in (inhale), your diaphragm lowers and flattens out allowing air to fill in your lungs. This expansion of your chest cavity presses down on the contents of your abdominopelvic cavity, containing the stomach, liver, pancreas, spleen, gallbladder, kidneys, small and large intestines, urinary bladder and internal reproductive organs. These organs are supported inferiorly by the muscles of your pelvic floor. When the abdominopelvic contents are pushed slightly inferior as your chest expands, your pelvic floor also moves slightly down- imagine stepping your foot down onto a trampoline- lengthening and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles.

When you breathe out (exhale), your diaphragm rises as the air leaves your lungs. Your abdominal contents rise and your pelvic floor also ascends, facilitating muscle shortening and contraction of the pelvic floor.

Thus we can use our breath to influence what is happening at our pelvic floor. Typically with pelvic pain, we want to help our pelvic floor relax and lengthen. To help us do that, we can practice deep breathing (see exercise on page 9) and pair it with our motor control and coordination exercises of the pelvic floor (see exercises on page 15). Practice trying to lengthen and relax your pelvic floor each time you inhale.

## Take Home Message:

**As you breathe in, your diaphragm and pelvic floor muscles lower. Thus, inhaling helps us to lengthen and relax the pelvic floor.**

**As you breathe out, your diaphragm and pelvic floor muscles rise. Thus, exhaling helps us to activate and contract the pelvic floor.**





## CHAPTER 04

# Exercises for Pelvic Pain



# Exercises

## Awareness Exercises

Using a cue or timer to check in with your pelvic floor? Are you tensing your muscles? Try to let them relax. Imagining as if your vagina was a closed flower bud and you are slowly attempting to open up the flower to let it bloom.

Eventually, you will cultivate more body awareness and begin to notice times where you are holding or clenching your muscles. Any time that you notice that you are tensing your muscles, try to gently let them go.

## Relaxation Training

Remember the relaxation techniques from Chapter One? Yep, they should be a core part of your regular exercise routine for pelvic pain management!

## Coordination and Motor Control

Increases balance, mobility and coordination of pelvis and surrounding musculature

- **Tabletop Rock Backs:**



Many sources for pelvic pain may have individuals start with child's pose. However, for some people, child's pose might feel too intense as it requires a lot bending at the hips which may irritate people who have pudendal neuralgia or tight hips/pelvis musculature. Rock backs are a good way to ease into a more flexed hip position and isolate controlled mobility of the hip joints.

- Start in table top pose with hands and knees directly under shoulders and hips.
- Inhale, shift pelvis back while maintaining a straight spine, only bending at the hips.
- Exhale and pull your body back to the starting tabletop position by rooting down firmly through the hands and keeping your core active.
- Rock back for 10 breaths.



# Exercises

## Happy Baby Stretch

Happy baby is a calming stretch that helps to open and release the pelvic floor and hips, and also stretches the lower back.

- Lying flat on your back, slowly bend both knees until you can hold the outside edges of your flexed feet with your hands. (If you aren't as flexible you can grab your ankles/lower legs.) Keep your arms on the outsides of your legs.
- Be sure to tuck your chin to keep your spine straight
- Using your arms, gently pull both knee towards the floor. Be sure to keep your shoulders and chest relaxed.



## Bound Angle (seated, supported reclined, or laying down)

Bound angle is a hip opening stretch for the muscles and connective tissues of the inside of the thighs.

- Pick the orientation that feels best for you.
- Bring the heels together and slowly let the knees fall out to the sides.
- You may need the support of pillows or blocks underneath the knees to prevent any hip discomfort or muscle guarding/holding.
- Place one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen and feel them rise and fall with your breath. Mindfully focus on slowing down and deepening your breath to inhale for four seconds and exhale for six seconds.



# Exercises

## Supported Puppy Pose

Supported puppy pose helps to lengthen the spine and maximally stretch the pelvic floor muscles allows us to expand the back of our ribcage to breathe more fully and softens the soft tissues around the abdomen, allowing us to let go of tension and muscle holding patterns.

- Begin in table top with your feet active and toes flexed.
- Start to reach out the hands long in front of you to lengthen the spine.
- Be sure to keep your back long and straight by resting your forehead on a book or block.
- Walk the feet out towards the side of the mat so they are slightly wider apart than your hips.
- Reach out long through the heels and hands as you visualize the sit bones expanding and the tailbone reaching up and out with each inhale





## CHAPTER 05

# Positions to Ease Pelvic Pain



# Every Body is Different: Find What Works for You!

Some positions for sexual intercourse may be more comfortable than others. Explore different options and see what works best for you. Here are a few positions to consider and try out:

- **Missionary Position Variations**

- Play around with different angles of your hips and knees- flexing or extending them more depending on what feels better
- Try arranging pillows on the outside of your knees to prop your legs up for increased support
- Play around with the position of your partner's legs (inside yours legs, outside yours legs) considering if it feels more comfortable for your legs to be more opened or closed.

- **Lying prone on your stomach with penetrative partner on top**

- Changing the angle of penetration can be a helpful option to consider. Laying on your stomach may allow your partner to stimulate an area that is more comfortable and pleasurable for you.

- **Support kneeling position (doggy style with your stomach or elbows resting on supportive surface)**

- Play around with the position of your partner's legs (inside yours legs, outside yours legs) considering if it feels more comfortable for your legs to be more opened or closed.



# Every Body is Different: Find What Works for You!

- **Both in sidelying**
  - You may try facing your partner or facing away
  - Playaround with your leg position. Does it feel more comfortable with your legs more open or closed? Try draping one leg over your partner's legs for support.
- **On top straddling penetrative partner**
  - Changing the direction you face changes the angle of penetration. Try facing toward your partner or facing away from them depending on what feels best
  - In this position, you can best control the depth and speed of penetration
  - Play around with your partners position laying down or sitting up

Adapted from Herman and Wallace's "Orthopedic Considerations for Sexual Activity"





## CHAPTER 06

# A Little Help in the Bedroom



# Helpful Tools

Sometimes we just need a little help to get us started! Fortunately, there are items that can be useful in decreasing painful sex and enhancing the sexual experience.

**Lubricants:** ideal for women who experience vaginal dryness or tearing during sex. Using a lubricant helps to reduce friction and irritation associated with sex. This can be very helpful for women who have undergone menopause or hysterectomy.

**Sexual buffer:** The Ohnut is a new and wonderful product designed specifically to help individuals who struggle with deep pelvic pain during sex. This nifty little device provides a soft, customizable ring barrier that allows you to control the depth at which your partner can enter without sacrificing their pleasure in the process. It allows couples to experience sex in a comfortable, pain-free range so you can relax and feel confident in the bedroom.

**Dilators:** Although dilators may raise some eyebrows when they are first encountered, they are very helpful tools in decreasing pain with sex. Dilators allow an individual to gradually tolerate penetration at greater diameters and depths. Dilators are particularly helpful because the individual is in control of penetration at all times, so it can help an individual to regain their confidence and decrease the perception of sex as a painful, threatening activity.

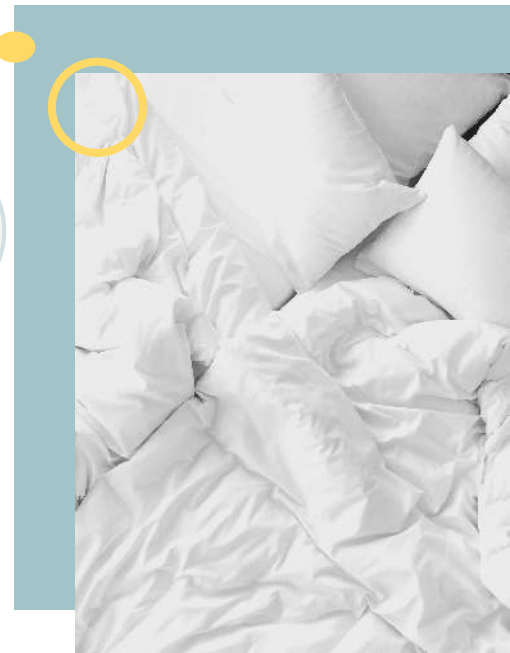
## **Communication:**

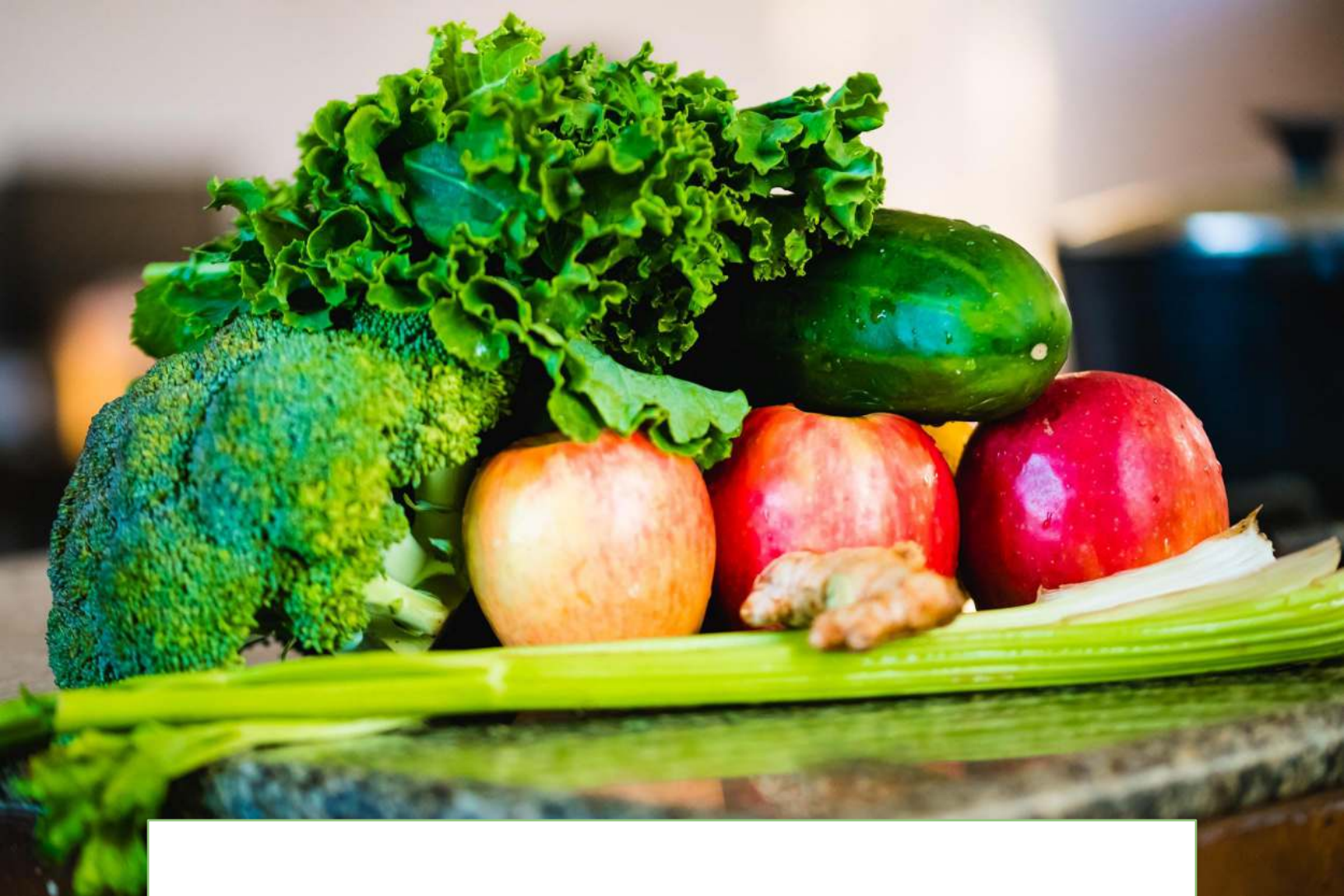
Communicating your needs to your partner is crucial! Where does it feel good, what position, depth, speed - what do you need in order to be pain-free? Explore to find what feels good again and let your partner know.

Foreplay is for EVERYONE. Foreplay should be a regular component of our sexual routine in any case and often it is overlooked as a necessary aspect of our sexual encounters, thus it can be an important missing component in those experiencing painful or uncomfortable sex.

- Gentle foreplay helps to increase vaginal lubrication and facilitates blood flow into the pelvic floor muscles. This allows for increased mobility of the tissues with less friction, which decreases the likelihood of experiencing pain or discomfort.
- Don't forget the use of toys to increase arousal and increase sexual response/pleasure

Check out pg 36 for products and other resources we love.





CHAPTER 07

# The Role of Nutrition



# Food is Medicine

What you eat greatly impacts the way your body works, moves, and feels. Your body can't run by itself. It uses the nutrition you ingest to function. The more efficient or healthy the food you consume the better functioning your body will be. "You are what you eat" just about sums it up. Your diet can fuel your body and make you more healthy, or it can make you feel more sluggish and lead to health common health ailments such as heart disease, diabetes, gastrointestinal distress, or chronic inflammation.

## Healthy bowel/bladder support

Our diet affects all aspects of our body, including our gut and bladder. For optimal bowel and bladder health, eat foods that are nutritionally rich, ideally organic fruits and vegetables, organically grown whole grains, hormone free organic meats, and/or wild caught fish. Avoid processed foods that are generally higher in oils, salts, sugars, and fats. Also avoid premade frozen meals where possible. Research and check labels for unhealthy chemicals and additives.

Ideally limit your sugar intake. Again check food labels. Avoid food with added sugar, sweeteners, honey, agave, molasses, syrup or juice. You would be surprised at how much is added to everyday foods. Too much sugar in the diet adversely affects both bowel and bladder function as well as sleep function, headaches and weight gain.

Have bowel trouble and need a little extra goodness for your gut? Bone broth can be taken daily to support bowel health. Bone broth contains glutamine which encourages gut epithelial cell growth!

Sometimes an elimination diet is necessary. It sounds like a drastic step to take, but it's worth the effort. Elimination diets allow you to see first hand the effects food have on your system. Many are often surprised of what their food triggers are. For more information and assistance, we recommend consulting with a nutritionist.



# Nutrition for Bowel and Bladder Health

## Avoiding bladder irritation

Some beverages and foods may cause irritation to the bladder worsening symptoms. This includes coffee, tea, alcohol and carbonated drinks. Citrus fruits like orange, grapefruit, lemon and lime can also irritate the bladder. Tomato based products, spicy food and chocolate are also on that list.

Try eliminating these known irritants out of your diet for one week. Reintroduce one item at a time over a 1-2 day period. If you have increases in bladder symptoms: urinary urgency, frequency or urinary incontinence you've found a trigger. Sometimes reducing the volume versus eliminating it altogether is sufficient to keep your symptoms at bay.

## Hydration

Water! It's what the majority of your body is made up of: an average of 60% is water. We use water to not only hydrate but flush out toxins that build up in the body. It's the main thing that keeps your large intestine (colon) happy. The traditional 8 cups of 8 ounces of water per day is gone. Not everyone needs 8 cups of water. It's now recommended that you drink half your body weight in ounces of water. More water is suggested during pregnancy or with exercise or breastfeeding.

## Avoiding constipation

First and foremost, stay hydrated! Your colon needs water to stay healthy and regular. Fiber rich foods including fruits, vegetables and whole grains help to improve digestion. Apples, pears and watermelon may cause gas and affect people who are more gut sensitive. Get moving. Exercising regularly will help to keep your bowel movements regular. Avoid colon sensitive foods and drinks such as coffee.

Pay attention to your urge to go. Don't delay. The same is said for straining and pushing to start or finish bowel movements. It does more harm than good. Issues like hemorrhoids, anal fissures and rectal prolapses are real and common with this habit. Other signs of constipation include a feeling of incomplete emptying, fewer than 3 bowel movements a week and stool consistency that resembles rocks/pebbles.



# Diet and Inflammation

## Anti-inflammatory diet

Did you know that many disease processes are the result of chronic inflammation in the body? Following a diet that eliminates inflammatory foods, thereby reducing inflammation throughout the body is a good first step to take when looking to treat pelvic pain.

Common anti-inflammatory foods include: flaxseeds (ideally ground), walnuts, salmon, sardines, halibut, herring, soybeans, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, winter squash, tofu, shrimp, cod, snapper, scallops, and tuna. Many of these foods contain high levels of Omega 3s, an anti-inflammatory fatty acid, which is essential to the diet. Omega 3 has been shown to lower cholesterol and decrease hardening of the arteries. You can get Omega 3's from fish oils but double check the source and purity of the oils before you take them. The National Institute of Health recommends 4,000 mg of Omega 3 per day for your heart.

Don't forget to spice things up in the kitchen! Spices and herbs such as turmeric, garlic, ginger, oregano, cloves, dill, sweet basil, parsley, lime zest and cinnamon add delicious flavor and natural anti-inflammatory benefits to each meal.



Other anti-inflammatory nutrients in the kitchen include antioxidants. Antioxidants can also be beneficial to the body and reduce stressed and damaged cells. It's likely you will need some professional advice from a nutritionist to get your nutrient imbalances corrected. This includes nutrients like Vitamins A, C, D, E, B6, magnesium, calcium, zinc, iron, potassium, phosphate, selenium and/or copper. For the majority of us it's better to get an expert on board than stress about how much of each your deficient in and which foods are best to help you re-establish a balance.



# Anti-inflammatory Smoothie

## Anti-inflammatory smoothie for pelvic pain relief

Try Jessica Drummond's antioxidant-rich smoothie that is bursting with anti-inflammatory benefits to help reduce pelvic pain.

Ingredients:

1/2 avocado

1/2 cup chopped raw kale or a scoop of greens powder

1/2 cup of frozen blueberries

20g high quality protein powder (For this recipe, I recommend Pure Paleo from Designs for Health.)

1/2 tsp cinnamon

1-2 cups unsweetened vanilla almond milk

Blend and enjoy!



Interested in more information on how nutrition can help pelvic pain, optimize women's health and balance hormones?

Check out Jessica Drummond's Integrative Women's Health Institute program or follow her on Instagram and Facebook for helpful tips and recipes!





## CHAPTER 08

# Physical Therapy for My What?!



# Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

If you have followed the advice in this e-book and still struggle with painful sex, don't be discouraged. Pelvic pain is a complex issue, but a skilled pelvic health physical therapist can help!

## What is Pelvic PT

Pelvic Health Physical Therapy is a specialized field of orthopedic physical therapy dedicated to treating pelvic pain and dysfunction. Pelvic health PTs also highly skilled at treat hip and back pain, which may often be related to pelvic floor dysfunction.

## Can it Help?

Physical therapy has been shown to be effective in managing and treating a wide variety of pelvic pain and dysfunctions, such as:

- Dyspareunia
- Vulvodynia
- Vulvar vestibulitis
- Vaginismus
- Pudendal neuralgia
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Pelvic congestion
- Levator Ani Syndrome/proctalgia fugax
- Coccyx or Tailbone pain
- Interstitial Cystitis (IC) or Painful Bladder Syndrome (PBS)
- Constipation and pain with bowel movements
- Post-Surgical: caesarean section, episiotomy, hysterectomy, appendectomy
- Orthopedic conditions such as low back, hip, or sacroiliac pain

## Is it right for me? Some things to consider.

- Do you have pelvic pain? Bladder pain? Rectal pain?
- Have you been seen by a physician to rule out infection or other serious pathology?
- Have you been treated for an infection, but your pain and symptoms continue to linger in the absence of infection?
- Do you have pain with intercourse, tampon use, and/or pelvic exams?
- Urinary/fecal leakage?
- Urinary/fecal urgency?
- Constipation?
- Abdominal or pelvic scar tissue and pain following birth or surgery?
- Pelvic organ prolapse?
- Healing trauma after sexual abuse?
- Hip or low back pain?

These are indicators that your pelvic floor muscles may not be functioning optimally and could benefit from pelvic PT evaluation and treatment.

**Call in for a free 15 minute consultation to figure out if pelvic health PT is right for you and discover how our therapists can help you reach your goals!**



# Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy



## What to Expect

Pelvic health PT's are first and foremost physical therapists, meaning that they are experts of the movement system. They will not only evaluate your pelvic floor, but they should also assess your overall musculoskeletal/neuromuscular systems and how your pelvic floor integrates and functions with your whole body.

This evaluation process includes:

- A complete health history and review
- General musculoskeletal and neurological examination (including pelvic internal and/or external assessment as appropriate and *with your consent*) and evaluation of fascial and visceral restrictions
- Postural evaluation and movement analysis
- Patient education about the condition (including anatomy and physiology)
- Development of an individualized treatment plan, including home exercise program, that is made with your goals in mind.

## How about the pelvic assessment?

Pelvic Floor dysfunction may be evaluated, assessed and treated, with informed consent, internally via the vagina and/or rectum.

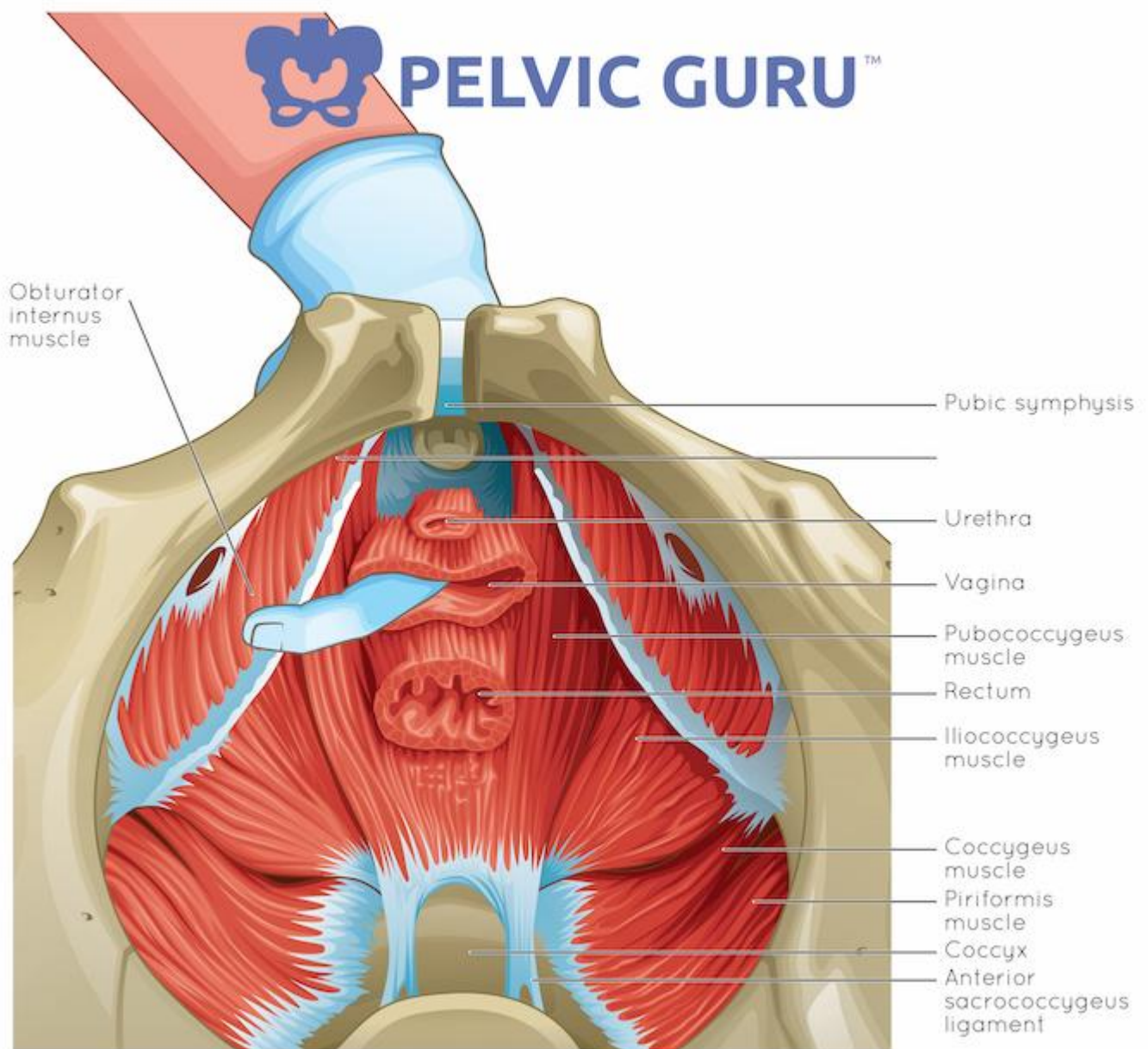
This requires advanced intensive training by a physical therapist. Internal pelvic floor exams performed by a physical therapist are different than those done by other clinicians. Physical therapists do not use speculums and in general spend more time evaluating the pelvic floor muscles including their tone, strength and ability to relax. Pelvic floor physical therapists are also sensitive to areas of spasm or pain as well as any other issues you may have.

Your therapist should review your condition with you and work in partnership with you to determine a plan of care going forward to help you meet your goals. Your individualized session will include physical therapy treatments that are beneficial to your specific condition and you will be taught a home exercise program and self management techniques which will progress over the course of treatment to assist you in independently managing your condition.



# The Internal Pelvic Floor Examination

The internal portion of a pelvic floor physical therapy examination includes a digital assessment using a single gloved finger inserted into the vagina and/or the rectum to assess the tone, quality, strength, and control of your pelvic floor muscles. This assessment gives your physical therapist specific and important information about what is and isn't functioning optimally so they can determine the best interventions and plan of care to get you back to feeling your best.



# Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

## Patient education for relaxation and stress reduction techniques to break the pain cycle

- Manual therapy: Myofascial release, connective tissue manipulation, myofascial trigger point release, joint mobilization.
- Neuromuscular re-education
- Patient education for relaxation and stress, reduction techniques to break the pain cycle.
- Postural re-education (including treatment and self-correction).
- Progression of stretches and exercises to enhance core stabilization, function, and activities of daily living.
- Home exercise program.

## A typical home exercise program will include

- Relaxation and stress reduction techniques.
- Exercise protocols for stretching and strengthening.
- Self myofascial trigger point release.
- Pain relief modalities or biofeedback when indicated.
- Resources for your education such as books and videos.

## Services:

Manual therapy consisting of soft tissue mobilization for muscles, connective tissues, neurovascular tissue, scar tissue mobilizations, and gentle stretching.

Muscle re-education to normalize muscle tone and muscle imbalances, and reduce dysfunctional movement patterns, and postural dysfunction.

Personalized exercise programs including: relaxation techniques, breathwork, motor control and coordination exercises, and strengthening exercises for the core, hip, and pelvic floor muscles.

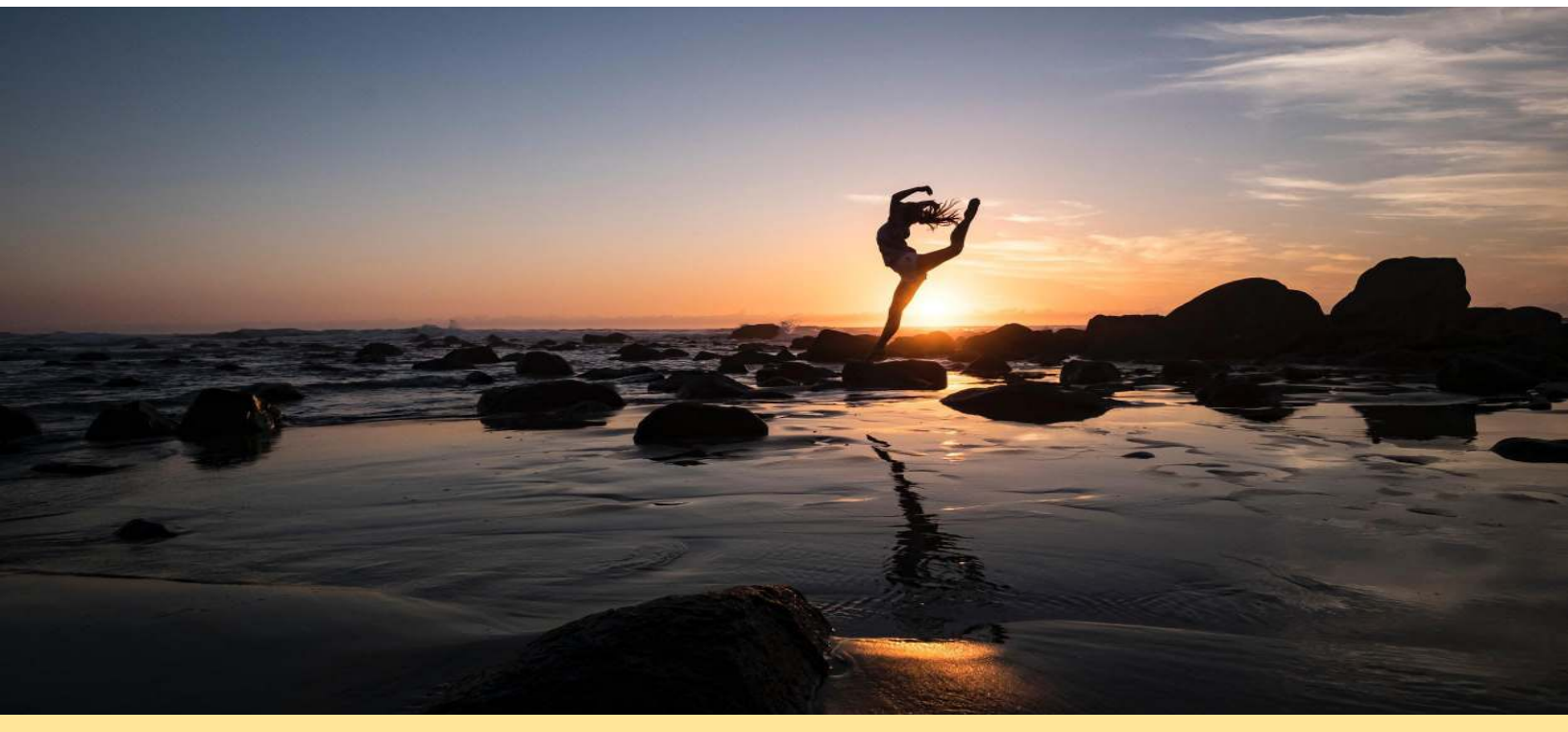


# Consult a Pelvic Health Physical Therapist

**Sex should never be painful. You deserve pleasurable sex which is free from pain, anxiety, and embarrassment.**

**Body Harmony Physical Therapy is here to help!**

**To schedule an evaluation or  
to speak to a physical therapist,  
give us a call (212) 233-9494**



# Resources

## Books

- “Healing Painful Sex” by Deborah Coady and Nancy Fish
- “Pelvic Pain Explained” by Elizabeth H. Akincilar, Elizabeth H. Rummer, and Stephanie A. Prendergast
- “Healing Pelvic Pain” by Amy Stein
- “Explain Pain” by David S. Butler and G. Lorimer Moseley

## Podcasts

- The Women’s Pelvic Health Podcast
- The Pelvic Health Podcast
- PT Below The Waist
- To Birth and Beyond
- Pelvic Pain Podcast|The Real Story About Chronic Pelvic Pain

## Tools

- The Ohnut- Sexual Buffer

## Dilators

- Soul Source
- Intimate rose

\*\*seek the guidance of a pelvic PT to use dilators safely and effectively\*\*

## Lubricants

- Intimate rose Vaginal Balm
- Slippery Stuff
- Desert Harvest

## Apps

- Calm
- Insight timer
- Headspace

## Organizations and Associations for Pelvic Pain

- International Pelvic Pain Society
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- American Chronic Pain Association
- National Vulvodynia Association
- American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology
- Endometriosis Association
- Interstitial Cystitis Association
- International Pelvic Pain Society
- International Society for the Study of Vulvovaginal Disease
- International Painful Bladder Foundation
- International Society for the Study of Women’s Sexual Health
- National Association for Continence
- National Women’s Health Resource Center
- National Pain Foundation
- Pudendal Hope
- Pudendal Neuralgia Association
- Society for Sex Therapy and Research
- Society for Women’s Health Research
- Vulval Pain Society



# Looking for a Pelvic Health PT? We got you!

Do you want to schedule a pelvic PT session, but don't know where to find a pelvic rehab trained therapist? Search for Pelvic Health PT's near you by checking out these valuable directories and resources to find trusted pelvic rehab practitioners!

- **Pelvic Guru Directory**  
<https://pelvicguru.com/directory/>
- **Academy of Pelvic Health PT Locator**  
<https://ptl.womenshealthapta.org/>
- **Herman and Wallace's Pelvic Rehab Directory**  
<https://pelvicrehab.com/>



# References

1. Coady, D. Fish, N. *Healing Painful Sex*. New York: Seal Press, 2011.
2. Herman and Wallace Pelvic Floor Course I:: The Sages College; August 2019; Albany.
3. Porges, SW. *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.
4. Wallace, Kathe. *Vulvar Care and Best Hygiene Practices Handout*.
5. Herman and Wallace *Orthopedic considerations for Sexual activity Handout*
6. Drummond, Jessica. Integrative Women's Health Institute Women's Health Coaching Course
7. Some images obtained from Unsplash

