

PRINT-Pelvic Floor therapy can help with multiple issues

Social Media post brings attention to the importance of pelvic muscles

Brittany Mahomes, the wife of Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, shared on social media recently that she fractured her back, possibly due to a weak pelvic floor. Those muscles are connected to the tailbone and lower back.

OSF Physical Therapist Rachel Williams says pregnancy and lifestyle can contribute to pelvic floor-related issues. Pelvic floor dysfunction (PDF) is often misdiagnosed or untreated. It refers to a wide range of problems that occur when the muscles of the pelvic floor are weak or too tight. Pregnancy and surgeries can impact pelvic floor muscles and it can affect women and men.

Williams says specially certified physical therapists take a holistic approach to figuring out what's wrong.

"We look at soaps. We look at diet. We look at lifestyle. We look at behavior, stress. Stress is huge." Williams explained, "When you're stressed, your muscles spasm. Your pelvic floor is a muscle and the next thing you know, you're going to the bathroom all the time. So, something as simple as that can make a big difference."

Some people can benefit from internal muscle manipulation but only if a patient is comfortable pursuing that kind of treatment.

"Sometimes if somebody is not comfortable with that internal treatment, we can just do stretching and relaxation techniques but there's also a way of doing internal manipulation to those muscles and some kind of abdominal myofascial release (gentle sustained pressure on connective tissue) to kind of release some of the restrictions," according to Williams.

Even smoking can contribute to pelvic pain, bladder and sexual function issues. Williams advises having a frank conversation with your primary care provider or specialist.

"People forget that your bladder is a muscle so it can be trained just like any muscle in your body. So, there is a lot of education on bladder health; what is normal. People think, 'Oh I just get up and go to the bathroom three times throughout the night, isn't that normal?' No. that's not really normal."

Therapy can include exercises to strengthen the pelvic muscles and guided meditation to loosen overly tight muscles in the pelvic floor.

If you've been suffering from unexplained chronic pelvic pain, incontinence, frequent urination, painful intercourse, or back, hip or sacroiliac joint (SI) pain that has not improved with time or traditional treatment, Williams suggests specifically asking if pelvic floor physical therapy could be a helpful option. It can be prescribed separately or along with other treatments or medications.

"I'm glad to speak to the physician and they are pleasantly surprised with the patient's success," Williams offers.

Pelvic floor physical therapy is covered by most insurance, although coverage does vary so check with your insurer.

What can pelvic floor therapy involve?

- Biofeedback - a process that allows an individual to monitor the ability to contract or relax a muscle
- Exercises for the pelvic floor muscles that support the bladder (i.e. Kegels)
- Trigger point and myofascial release techniques
- Diet modifications
- Lifestyle changes
- Physiological quieting techniques