

Postnatal Pelvic Floor Health



The way a woman's body transforms to carry a baby throughout pregnancy is nothing short of miraculous. Over the course of 40 weeks, the pelvic floor, which is primarily responsible for supporting pelvic organs like the uterus, bladder and rectum, strains to support the developing baby as well. This, in combination with the pushing during labor and the overall stress of childbirth, contributes to the weakened pelvic floor that can result in pelvic floor disorders.

After giving birth, many women are focused on getting their pre-pregnancy body back, a healthy goal that has been sensationalized by the media frenzy surrounding celebrities who lose that baby weight in record time. What women may fail to realize is that restoring internal health post-pregnancy is what's important for long-term pelvic health.

What You Can Do

During the post-pregnancy recovery period, it is important to avoid causing further damage to the pelvic floor—no heavy lifting, no straining to produce a bowel movement, no high-impact activities, and no exercising until the doctor gives the OK. Women should stick to exercise like yoga or Pilates, which lend themselves naturally to restoring pelvic strength.

Kegel exercises should be performed daily to keep pelvic floor muscles strong. Performing these exercises during pregnancy can prevent incontinence that is common during the third trimester and make labor easier. [Performing Kegels after giving birth can restore the pelvic floor and prevent prolapse, and very often eliminate incontinence.](#) Kegels are also popular because they have been shown to increase sexual sensation and orgasm, for both women and their partners.

Consulting a physical therapist (there are several who specialize in pelvic health) is a good idea. A physical therapist may use a variety of methods to help you regain your pelvic strength, such as pelvic massage, biofeedback therapy, proper Kegel instruction, posture correction and core strength build-up.

Obesity and smoking have also been known to cause pelvic floor disorders, so maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle are important in preventing incontinence and prolapse.

Why It Matters

Ideally, pelvic floor health should be something women are informed and proactive about. However, many women are not aware of pelvic health issues until they are faced with symptoms like [stress urinary incontinence \(SUI\), experienced by as many as 15 million adult women in the U.S. alone](#), or the pain associated with pelvic organ prolapse (POP), which affects about half of all childbearing women.

Despite the fact that so many women experience these pelvic floor disorders, the symptoms can range from asymptomatic, which does not require treatment, to very severe. Women with severe prolapse symptoms may experience pelvic and lower back pain, may feel a pulling sensation in the pelvis, may have problems with bowel movements, and may feel pain during sex.

In cases where prolapse symptoms interfere with daily life, corrective surgery is an option. However, it should be noted that surgery—especially when transvaginal mesh is used—carries risks. [In fact, far too many women have experienced mesh erosion, organ perforation and sexual dysfunction after having mesh implanted](#). Some women require multiple revision surgeries to remove the mesh and correct complications, though this is not always possible.

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