



## MANAGING SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION WITH PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

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**Note: This handout is offered as a communication aid for patients and their providers. It is not a substitute for professional examination, diagnosis, or treatment.**

### INTRODUCTION

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy can vastly improve people's quality of life after cancer treatment. The therapy takes the investment of time, therapy sessions, and practice between therapy sessions, which can help people regain control over many symptoms affecting their quality of life.

Physical therapists trained in [pelvic floor muscle health](#) treat and coach the patient while maintaining dignity and privacy for their patients. Each plan of care will be unique to the individual patient's needs.

Some people mistakenly believe doing Kegel exercises at home will serve the same purpose as Pelvic Floor Therapy. While Kegel exercises may be part of Pelvic Floor Therapy, they make up only a small part of it.

### Symptoms Managed by Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

Pelvic floor therapy can help address urinary and or fecal (poop) incontinence related to stretched pelvic floor muscles. It can alleviate life-altering [pain and symptoms](#), which often occur related to cancer and cancer treatment, including:

- urinary incontinence
- fecal (poop) incontinence
- [chronic constipation](#)
- frequent urination
- pain with vaginal intercourse
- vaginal pain
- pain tampon insertion or ob-gyn visits
- pain with increased pelvic-floor tension
- pain in the abdominal muscles
- pain in the rectum
- pain in the pelvic floor
- pain in the buttocks
- pain in the tailbone
- buttocks pain
- pain in the testicles
- penile pain
- chronic male genital pain

- burning with urination for males, related to chronic prostatitis
- [erectile dysfunction](#)
- [ejaculation dysfunction](#) and or pain with ejaculation

### **The Pelvic Floor Explained**

[26 muscles, ligaments, blood vessels, and nerves](#) make up the pelvic floor and create a complex structure. It is like a sling woven across the entire circular opening of the pelvic and tail bones. Loose, tense, tight, or weak muscles in this area can cause incontinence of urine and or stool, constipation, sexual dysfunction, and chronic pain.

The pelvic floor muscles may become weakened due to surgery, lack of use, and trauma; this includes the trauma of childbirth.

### **What To Expect**

[Pelvic floor rehabilitation](#), according to the Cleveland Clinic and Motion Physical Therapy, involves:

- Flexibility and strength assessment and treatment
- Pelvic floor muscle surface EMG (or biofeedback)
- [Observation](#) of how you walk, stand, and sit to identify posture issues that may affect pelvic floor function
- Pelvic area internal and external muscle assessment and treatment, which may include an internal examination
- Posture exercises
- Myofascial release (which is the massage of the [thick connective tissue](#) that covers and supports muscles throughout the body)
- Relaxation techniques and diaphragmatic breathing
- Development of an individualized home exercise program

### **Physical therapists work to preserve your dignity**

Physical therapists understand that the intimate nature of some examination, assessment, and treatment processes can make a person feel vulnerable, embarrassed, or uncomfortable. They will proceed slowly and explain things well.

Motion PT Group shares that it is helpful to understand that it may **take 6 to 8 one-hour physical therapy sessions** to start to feel some relief from Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy. This may seem like a long time, but the investment is well worth it.

### **HOW TO PROCEED**

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms discussed here, ask your oncologist or primary care provider for a referral to a pelvic floor therapy program. In the US, if you need help finding in-network Pelvic Floor Therapy providers, call the member services of your insurance company for that information.

Your doctor may want first to rule out other causes of your pain.

**To further your knowledge and comfort, After Cancer recommends also reading the following patient handouts:**

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Penile Rehabilitation Using a VED  
Let's Slide Into Lubricant  
Sensate Focus: Touching Exercise to Rediscover Intimacy  
Practical Solutions for Low Libido  
Ways to Reduce the Impact of Cancer Therapy on the Vulva And Vagina

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