

PATIENT INFORMATION

What to Expect when you visit a Bladder, Bowel and Pelvic Health Physiotherapist

This leaflet is to provide you with information about an assessment by a specialist Pelvic Health Physiotherapist

Our Service

The Specialist Pelvic Health Physiotherapists (formerly Women's Health Physiotherapists) work in clinics in Totnes, Newton Abbot, Teignmouth, Paignton, Brixham and Ashburton.

You may have self-referred into our service or the GP or other health professionals may have referred you to the service. We are a caring and passionate team and take a holistic approach to our patients' care.

Conditions we treat

We treat a variety of conditions in women including

- urinary incontinence (difficulty controlling the bladder)
- vaginal prolapses
- pelvic pain
- sexual problems associated with pelvic floor muscle dysfunction
- overactive bladder symptoms (such as urgency or frequency)
- pregnancy related pain

We also work in a specialist Bowel Biofeedback service that can accept referrals from Consultants. In this clinic we treat men and women with

- faecal incontinence (difficulty controlling the bowel),
- constipation

- bowel dysfunctions associated with pelvic floor muscle and abdominal dysfunction.

We aim to help our patients improve their symptoms and learn to self-manage effectively and maintain overall positive changes to health and well-being.

We work closely with the Continence Nursing Team and the Urogynaecology service and where appropriate we can make an onward referral for further investigations or interventions.

What to expect when you attend?

You will be seen by a female specialist Pelvic Health Physiotherapist in a private room. The initial appointment involves a detailed assessment to understand your problems and identify your goals. We understand this can be a tricky topic to discuss and appreciate the personal and sensitive aspect of these conversations. This appointment can take up to an hour and follow up appointments last up to 30 minutes. We are able to offer telephone appointments if you would prefer, or a telephone follow up after a discussion with your Physiotherapist.

Following your initial assessment, an internal examination may be suggested to gain more information to direct your treatment. The internal examination of your pelvic floor will only be done with your consent. This does not have to take place on your first appointment and may not be suggested at all if the therapist does not feel it would be beneficial.

Why does a Physiotherapist need to perform a vaginal/rectal examination?

An internal vaginal/rectal examination will only be performed, with your consent, by a specially trained Chartered Physiotherapist to assess the function of your pelvic floor muscles.

Treatment often includes exercises for these muscles to improve your symptoms. Following an internal examination, the physiotherapist is able to tailor an individualised exercise programme suitable to you and your symptoms.

What is involved in an internal examination?

You will be in a private treatment room with the door closed and locked. You will be asked to remove your lower clothes including underwear and lie on your back on the bed, with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed. You will be given a sheet to put over your lap.

As part of the examination the physiotherapist will insert a lubricated gloved finger into your vagina or back passage to assess the strength of your muscles.

You will be asked to perform a series of pelvic floor muscle exercises to assess your muscle function.

Throughout the examination the physiotherapist will explain what she is doing and what she would like to assess next. At any point you can ask the physiotherapist to stop. This assessment should not be painful, if it is please let the physiotherapist know as this will help to inform the physiotherapist what is going on.

What are the risks of an internal examination?

Although this procedure carries very little risk when performed with correct infection control procedures, there are certain conditions/situations which are listed as precautions under the national guidelines. You must therefore inform your physiotherapist if any of the following apply:

- You are / may be pregnant
- You have had a baby recently or have had recent pelvic surgery
- You currently have any vaginal infections or a urinary tract / bladder infection
- You have recently received radiotherapy
- You have an allergy to latex
- Your cultural / religious beliefs do not allow this type of examination
- If you have ever seen your doctor with a complaint of pelvic pain or other problems around the pelvic area
- You are menstruating
- Psychosexual problems, or trauma in your past that may make these examinations too distressing for you


What will my treatment involve?

The role of the physiotherapy treatment is to help you maintain and return to normal pelvic floor muscle function. Treatment may include some of the following:

- Pelvic floor muscle strengthening using Kegel exercises, EMG biofeedback, muscle stimulation
- Pelvic floor muscle relaxation / manual therapy for overactive or painful pelvic floor muscles
- Diaphragmatic breathing techniques to assist pelvic floor muscle function
- Core muscle strengthening
- Bladder retraining for overactive bladder syndrome
- Fluid, dietary and lifestyle advice
- Safe rehabilitation following pelvic floor surgery or hysterectomy
- Advice on pelvic and vaginal health
- Teaching of trans-anal irrigation
- Bowel retraining

Useful contact

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet please contact the Physiotherapy Department on

 **Tel: (01803) 655340**

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.