

Pelvic Health Therapy

People at any age may have weak or tight muscles of the pelvic floor or limitations of the pelvic joints. These problems can cause other conditions, such as incontinence or pelvic pain. A therapist can help treat problems with the pelvic floor to improve your daily quality of life.

The *pelvic floor* includes the muscles, ligaments, connective tissues and nerves that support the bladder, rectum, uterus and vagina. Read this handout to learn more about pelvic floor conditions and how therapy can help.

What is incontinence?

- **Urinary incontinence** is accidental leaking of urine and includes 3 types:
 - » **Stress incontinence** is leaking urine due to pressure on the bladder. This type of leaking can happen with exercise, sneezing, coughing, lifting or other physical activities.
 - » **Urge incontinence** is leaking urine due to a sudden strong need to urinate.
 - » **Mixed incontinence** is leaking urine due to either urge or stress situations.
- **Fecal incontinence** is accidental loss of stool.

What is pelvic pain?

Pelvic pain is pain located in your lower abdomen, pelvis and the perineum (the area surrounding your genitals and anus). You also may feel pain in the hip, buttock or tailbone.

What causes pelvic pain?

Pain is complex. There are many different causes of pain in the pelvis. These causes can be biological, psychological and social. There is usually not just one reason for the pain.

- **Biological** causes include:
 - » Scars from pelvic or abdominal surgery, or childbirth
 - » Weak, tight or tender pelvic muscles
 - » Strained joints or pressure on pelvic nerves
 - » Other factors such as genetics, inflammation, hormones, diet and sleep

- **Psychological** causes include:

- » Thoughts and beliefs
- » Memories, experiences and expectations you have about pain
- » Emotions
- » Coping behaviors

- **Social** causes include:

- » Relationships with family and friends
- » Socioeconomic status
- » Environmental factors—for example, whether you are safe and have access to food, water and a space that can help you heal.
- » Cultural and religious beliefs around pain and how to manage it
- » Societal constructs—for example, pain as it relates to body image or society's expectations about gender and gender roles.

How can pelvic health therapy help?

You may benefit from pelvic health therapy for incontinence or pelvic pain if you:

- Leak urine during normal daily activity or with sneezing, coughing, laughing or exercise.
- Have difficulty holding urine when you feel a sudden strong urge to urinate.
- Have difficulty starting to urinate.
- Urinate more often than every 3 to 4 hours during the day or more than 1 time during the night.
- Have pelvic pain with sitting, sexual activity, pelvic exams or bowel movements.

What does pelvic health therapy for incontinence and pelvic pain include?

Your therapist will design an individualized treatment plan for you. Your plan may include:

- Lifestyle education about habits that can affect incontinence and pain
- Techniques to reduce urinary urgency and frequency
- Exercise to strengthen pelvic and trunk (core) muscles
- Exercise to stretch tight muscles of the pelvis, hips and trunk
- Hands-on techniques to reduce tight muscles and improve scar tissue and joint movement
- Posture education
- Biofeedback to help learn how to use your pelvic muscles correctly
- Relaxation techniques to help reduce tense pelvic muscles
- Education on adaptive equipment and techniques to support your pelvic health

How do I schedule an appointment for pelvic health therapy?

To schedule an appointment at a HealthPartners, Park Nicollet or TRIA location, please call 952-993-5900 or schedule online at [HealthPartners.com/care/appointments](https://www.healthpartners.com/care/appointments).

