



The Patient with Stress Incontinence and Pelvic Pain

It has been widely recognized that urinary incontinence is due to weak pelvic floor muscles of normal length. Traditional physical therapy successfully treats weak pelvic floor muscles with strengthening exercises often utilizing modalities such as biofeedback and electrical stimulation. These patients typically do not suffer from pelvic pain as well. However, there are cases in which patients have stress incontinence and pelvic pain. Unlike the typical urinary incontinence patient, this patient population has a short or hypertonic pelvic floor. A short pelvic floor, as described by Kotarinos and Fitzgerald, can play a pivotal role in developing pelvic pain. In some cases, a short and weak pelvic floor can also cause stress incontinence in addition to pelvic pain. Specifically, because the levator ani muscles are short and weak, they are unable to sufficiently contribute to urethral closure during laughing, sneezing, and coughing, resulting in stress incontinence. This patient population must be treated differently than the patient with stress incontinence without pelvic pain. Standard strengthening exercises for patients with incontinence and pain will virtually always result in increased pelvic pain and incontinence. Prescribing strengthening exercises that repetitively contract the pelvic floor muscles to a patient with a short and tight

as illogical as asking a patient with a hip contracture to repetitively flex the hip in the hopes of restoring normal tone and motor control. Unfortunately, many of these patients are incorrectly treated with pelvic floor strengthening exercises which do not resolve their stress incontinence and make their pelvic pain worse. Not only is this frustrating and disappointing to the patient, but also to the clinician who may not have sufficient experience or training with this specific patient population. A successful physical therapy treatment program would include manual therapy techniques to lengthen the pelvic floor muscles, restoring normal tone and motor control.

Post-Partum Physical Therapy

In Europe and Australia, post-partum women are required to undergo a physical therapy evaluation prior to discharge from the hospital. The purpose is to identify the musculoskeletal consequences of labor and delivery and proactively address them to avoid later functional limitations. Incontinence, dyspareunia, and low back and pelvic pain are common problems that may arise which can be easily prevented with appropriate physical therapy. The physical therapists at the Pelvic Health and Rehabilitation Center have specific training in post-partum care to meet the needs of your post-partum patient.