



# Overactive Pelvic Floor Muscles

## Service User Information Leaflet

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This leaflet is designed to give you some basic information on overactive pelvic floor muscles and the management of this condition. There are links to other sources of information on the back page.

## **What is an Overactive Pelvic Floor?**

The pelvic floor muscles are like other muscles in the body. As such, they can suffer from excess tension and tightness. Imagine holding your hand in a tight fist for many days, weeks or months. How sore would your hand be? This is what happens in the pelvic floor muscles, they hold tension which leads to pain.

Sometimes the muscles can develop trigger points which are small, tight knots within the muscle which can be extremely painful and can refer pain to other organs.

## **Where might I feel it?**

Pain can be felt in many areas such as:

- Vagina (in women)
- Labia and/or vulva (in women)
- Anus
- Bladder
- Penis (in men)
- Testicles/scrotum (in men)
- Coccyx
- Groin
- Lower back
- Stomach

It can also lead to various other symptoms such as:

- Bladder urgency and frequency
- Incontinence
- Erectile dysfunction (in men)
- Pain during or after sex (men and women)
- Bowel problems

## **What causes an Overactive Pelvic Floor?**

Sometimes there is no explanation for why this has happened. Sometimes it can be triggered from other sources such as:

- Urine infection
- Thrush
- Stress
- Pelvic surgery
- Childbirth
- Trauma or abuse
- Endometriosis or other painful conditions

## **What can I do to help myself?**

- Get checked out by your doctor to rule out other causes for your pain
- Relaxation can help
- Abdominal breathing exercises (the website [www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com](http://www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com) has some good tips for doing this)
- Warm baths or heat pads on the area
- Take pain relief as prescribed by your doctor
- Massage, stretches and muscle release as taught by your physiotherapist can be very useful
- A reduction in aggravating factors such as cycling and sex until the pain has improved.

## **Physiotherapy Treatment**

This may involve massage of the soft tissues, stretching of tight muscles (as in other parts of the body) and teaching of relaxation. The physiotherapist may also use biofeedback to help you learn about your muscles and their function. The physiotherapist can teach you ways to help you understand and manage your pain better.

## **For further help and advice:**

[www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com](http://www.pelvicphysiotherapy.com)

This website has been developed by Maeve Whelan who is a specialist physiotherapist working in Dublin.

[www.pelvicpainhelp.com](http://www.pelvicpainhelp.com)

This website is about the Wise-Anderson protocol which has been found to be very successful in the USA.

[www.pelvicpain.org.uk](http://www.pelvicpain.org.uk)

A UK based support network for patients suffering from pelvic pain.

Contact [nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net) (to order your free relaxation CD—Steps for Stress)