

Have you ever coughed, laughed, or sneezed and leaked? About 1 in 3 women suffer with stress urinary incontinence at some stage of their life.

Pelvic health is often a very taboo topic amongst the general population and unfortunately many Australian women are not getting the help they need. This is often due to lack of awareness around pelvic health as well as lack of accessible and affordable information and help.

WHAT IS THE PELVIC FLOOR?

The pelvic floor consists of superficial (on the surface) and deep muscles, that act as a floor to hold up our bladder, uterus, and rectum. Like any other muscles in the body, the pelvic floor muscles need to be the perfect amount of strong and stretchy. Too weak and/or too lax can cause issues such as incontinence (leaking of urine or faeces), and prolapse (dropping of the bladder, uterus or rectum). A pelvic floor that is too strong and/or too tight, can cause pelvic pain including pain when urinating or defecating, pain during sex, pain using a tampon, pain at certain times of a women's cycle (not just exclusively during ovulation or menstruation) and pain that radiates to other parts of the body including the back and down your legs.

WHAT CAUSES PELVIC FLOOR ISSUES?

Pelvic floor problems can arise at any time. When a woman starts menstruating, period pain may arise, however, any pain that does not settle or cannot be managed, is NOT normal. Conditions known as endometriosis, adenomyosis, or PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome) just to name a few, can be the cause of unusually heavy and painful periods which can lead to a hypertonic (tight) pelvic floor. Pregnancy and birth, including birth related trauma, as well as aging and menopause, can cause incontinence and prolapse.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

Pelvic health issues can have a detrimental effect on our day-to-day lives as well as physically and emotionally – at times making us feel lost, alone and helpless.

Despite many of these pelvic related issues being either preventable or treatable, many women with symptoms do not seek treatment. This needs to end!

Recently it has been amazing to see women advocating for women through social media, as well as educating our government, to ensure we get adequate and affordable access to pelvic health professionals when needed. For some more info check out [this petition](#), Liberal member Fiona Martin advocating for post natal women [here](#), and [EndoActive](#).

SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Be aware of what is “normal” so you can identify when something is not normal.
- Talk about it to your friends, daughters, aunties, mothers, grandmothers, or anyone that will listen about the importance of good pelvic floor health.
- Get your pelvic floor checked by a pelvic health physiotherapist if you have any concerns.
- Get your pelvic floor checked if you are pregnant and educate yourself to ensure you have adequate information to help you during your pregnancy and post-natal period (including a six week post-natal pelvic health checkup).
- If you suffer from pelvic pain, pain during sex, or pain using a tampon, seek help!
- If you suffer from leaking, have a feeling of heaviness, dragging, pressure, difficulty urinating or defecating, seek help!
- Remember, there is always something that can be done to help.
- Lastly, if you think you know how to do pelvic floor exercises, continue doing them, but I encourage you to go to a pelvic health physiotherapist to check you are doing them correctly. (You would not step into a gym without knowing how to use the equipment!)

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