

# Pelvic Floor Dialogues

So I pee a little when I laugh. That's normal right?

How has my body changed "down there" since I had my baby?

Everyone talks about Kegels. Do they really work? How much is enough?

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## POP Goes the Baby—and the Pelvic Organs

Are you making that pregnancy to do list, e.g., line up a doctor, eat better, stop smoking and drinking alcohol...? Don't forget to add "strengthen the pelvic floor." The pelvic floor is the set of muscles and other tissues that support your pelvic organs, which are the bladder, vagina and rectum. And extra baby weight, as well as the process of giving birth, can really stress a woman's pelvic floor. Strong pelvic floor muscles can help reduce your risk for pregnancy-related pelvic floor problems such as vaginal tearing. Sometimes those injuries lead to health problems later in life.

Twenty years after 195 New Zealand women gave birth, researchers looked at their medical records. Some had [pelvic organ prolapse](#) (POP), or the dropping of the pelvic organs, such as the bladder, uterus and rectum, caused by a loss of vaginal support. Others had [accidental bowel leakage](#) (ABL), which is the leakage of stool (fecal incontinence) or leakage of stool and gas (anal incontinence). It turned out that most of the women damaged their pelvic floors during the birth of their first born. And, **no** further damage occurred during additional vaginal births.

- The conclusion: Blame those pelvic floor problems on your oldest child!
- The takeaway: Take the time to get your pelvic floor into shape before you get pregnant.
- Want to cross something off your to do list?
  - [Watch a video about doing pelvic floor muscle exercises](#) and start strengthening your pelvic floor today.
  - Also, download a [factsheet about pelvic floor muscle exercises](#).



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## There's Help for PFDs—But, You Gotta Ask

Whether you are a young woman ready to start a family or an older woman enjoying retirement, here are two reasons to talk with your doctor about your pelvic floor:

During pregnancy, many women experience [urinary incontinence](#) (UI), or the accidental leakage of urine. Usually, UI is related to the weight of the baby pressing on your bladder. For many women, the leakage stops after they give birth. But, for others the leakage continues long after birth. UI is more apt to linger in women with a weak pelvic floor. So, yup, same message—[strengthen your pelvic floor!](#)

Advance forward several decades and we learn that 1 in 4 women age 55 years and older believe that [pelvic floor disorders](#) (PFDs) are just a normal part of aging. PFDs are conditions that affect the muscles of the bottom of the pelvis (called the pelvic floor), including [POP](#), [UI](#), [ABL](#). The truth: PFDs are **NOT** a normal part of aging. You do not need live with these conditions or manage symptoms on your own. Talk with your provider about pelvic floor symptoms.

- Need help starting the conversation?
  - Download a fact sheet about how to [Talk to Your Doctor about PFDs](#).
  - Also, check out the [free fact sheets on POP, UI, and ABL](#).

## Yea, But I'm an Old Lady—Will it Work? Is it Worth it?

Yes, girlfriend!

As your body goes through menopause, some pelvic floor issues may emerge. For example, the risk for [stress urinary incontinence](#) (SUI) is greater. SUI is urine leakage with physical activity such as laughing, sneezing, lifting, or exercise. There are multiple options for treatment including exercises and surgery. Also, there is a simple office procedure that can help stop that leakage. For some women suffering SUI, the valve that keeps urine in the bladder does not close properly. The urethra, the tube that carries urine outside of the bladder, remains open and with gravity, the urine drips out. Injecting a material (called a bulking agent), around the walls of the urethra narrows its width, can reduce UI with coughing or sneezing.



Got your SUI taken care of and need some motivation to get moving? The answer is “yes, but.” There are many health benefits associated with being active as we age. However, new research concludes that when it comes to exercising and aging, “men are from Mars and women are from Venus.” For men, indeed exercise gets the big thumbs up. For women, however, things are more complicated. Researchers have found that individual hormonal shifts and risk factors for heart disease can impact how helpful exercise is for keeping healthy, so be sure to discuss your exercise plan with your healthcare provider.

- In the meantime, download a fact sheet about [urethral bulking](#).
- And, talk with other women—join the [Voices for PDF community](#).

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## Women with PFDs Targeted by Scammers

Hundreds, maybe even thousands of individuals, fell prey to a scam that targets women with [PFDs](#), reports the NY Times. Behind the scams are lawyers seeking bigger settlements for vaginal mesh cases. These legal eagles discovered that women who have their implants removed are more likely to win large financial awards from the medical device manufacturers. And, since the lawyers earn a percentage of the settlement award, a larger settlement means more money in their pockets. Here's how it works:

- A stranger who somehow knows a lot about you and your health history calls and says that your vaginal mesh implant is defective. The caller warns that if you do not have the implant removed, it may kill you.
- The scammer offers the name of a doctor to do the removal surgery, a lawyer to sue the medical device company on your behalf, and a finance company to provide a "cash advance" to help you pay for the removal surgery.
- If the lawyer wins the law suit, the lawyer gets a percentage of the financial award.
- If the lawyer loses, the finance company comes after you for repayment of the cash advance, which is a high-interest loan.

*"The profits are immense. So are the costs to women.*

*Some suffer physical problems from the surgery. Others say they have become depressed or unable to work. Still others have to get mesh reinserted." reports the New York Times.*

The takeaway: Beware of strangers calling about your vaginal mesh implant. Before doing anything, talk with your primary care provider and/or surgeon. Ask your current providers if you need to have the mesh removed.

The article is a very interesting read. Take a minute to learn more about this [scam targeting women with PFDs](#).

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## The Future of Health Begins With You!

The NIH is proud to announce an exciting new research program and they want you to join! All of Us is a historic effort by the NIH to gather data from one million (or more) people living in the United States to accelerate research and improve health.

If you're over 18, you are eligible! The NIH wants to include all ages and genders, participants from all across the country, healthy and those with acute or chronic conditions, to reflect the rich diversity of the country. Your participation can help improve healthcare for people like you in your community.

Want to learn more or sign up? Visit [allofus.nih.gov](http://allofus.nih.gov) and check out the FAQs and program overview, or join now!

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## Around the Web

- [Cycling Tied to Urinary Infections, But Also Better Sex](#)
  - [Train Your Bladder](#)
  - [How a Ring of Titanium Beads Can Help Fecal Incontinence](#)
  - [The Pelvic Floor: Where It is, When to Worry and How to Work It](#)
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## The Rest of the Story

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