

# 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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## Love is in the Air: Many Women with PFDs Enjoy Sex

How's your sex life? That's the question that 755 Canadian women with pelvic floor disorders (PFDs), conditions that affect the muscles of the bottom of the pelvis (called the pelvic floor), answered for researchers. PFDs can really impact intimacy, but the results of this study were heart-warming. Most of the women (74 percent) had a sexual partner. And, despite having a PFD, more than half of them (56 percent) were sexually active. Women with stress urinary incontinence (SUI), urine leakage with physical activity such as laughing, sneezing, lifting, or exercise, were more apt to enjoy a good roll in the hay. Those with pelvic organ prolapse (POP), dropping of the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus and rectum) caused by a loss of vaginal support and bowel problems, reported that sex was often uncomfortable. However, the

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researchers looked at other factors that might be leading to the sexual issues. They found that some of the women had vaginal dryness due to age-related hormonal changes. And, the dryness was the key reason that these women were not sexually active. Vaginal dryness can be improved with lubricants and creams. So, the message is that women with PFDs CAN and DO enjoy sex. If you are experiencing problems in that department, talk with your doctor. Find out if another health issue is impacting your sex life and if it can be treated.

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## Spread the Love: Embrace Your Team of Medical Providers

Researchers from the Henry Ford Health System and Wayne State University analyzed the medical records of 107 women with chronic pelvic pain (CPP). Their hope was to learn more about how CPP may impact a women's psyche (DUH!) and quality of life (did I say, DUH yet?). At first blush, the study findings appear obvious. However, what this study revealed was the importance of women with CPP working with a team of healthcare providers:

- A therapist can help you identify coping mechanisms for living with chronic pain, which may improve both your psyche and quality of life.
- A physical therapist can help release tightened trigger points in the pelvic area and teach you valuable self-care techniques.
- A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you identify foods and beverages that may be contributing to your pelvic pain. And, design a custom diet to keep you healthy!

In addition, other research highlights the importance of patients being an active member of their health care teams. When it comes to POP, for example, the medical provider relies on your description of the vaginal symptoms. How you describe the bulge of the dropped organs helps the provider diagnosis the severity of the prolapse. Plus, if your POP requires surgery, the doctor relies on your input to determine the success of the surgery. If you feel discomfort after the recuperation time from surgery, tell your surgeon.

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## Absorbent Products for UI: This Valentine's Day, Gain the Courage to Go Out

If you need to use absorbent products on a short-term or long-term basis to help manage urinary leakage, you are not alone. An article in a leading nursing journal offers guidance on selecting the best product for your lifestyle:

- Active? A slimline insert pad is a good option.
- Out and about for long periods of time? Look for pads that are more absorbent.
- Mild urinary incontinence (UI) or accidental leakage of urine? A less absorbent pad is probably adequate for collecting any leakage and keeping the urine away from the delicate skin down there.
- UI mild during the day but severe at night? You may want to wear a light/medium absorbency insert pad during the day. For night, a wraparound pad would offer greater protection.

There are also pads specifically designed for men and for women. Women's pads are more absorbent in the area between the abdomen and the thighs. In contrast, men's pads are more absorbent in the front. Many prefer to use a mail order service for purchasing pads. Mail order companies offer a wider choice of products. They also remove the embarrassment of buying the products at a local store. Plus, these services often provide sample pads, which lets you try out different styles and absorbencies before placing a full order.

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## New Hope for Accidental Bowel Leakage

Two studies offer new hope for women with accidental bowel leakage (ABL), leakage of stool (fecal incontinence) or leakage of stool and gas (anal incontinence).

The first study evaluated a new device made of a soft silicone material, called an anal plug. By inserting the plug into the anus, it seals off the top of the anal canal. This helps to stop leakage of stool. Seventy-three adults, who leaked stool at least one time per week, participated in the study. Each participant wore the anal insert device continually for 12 weeks. The findings are hopeful. None of the study participants reported any problems with the anal plug. Nearly 80 percent of the participants had a 50 percent reduction in frequency of stool leakage. Plus, patients experienced fewer episodes of fecal incontinence. Most of the participants reported being satisfied with the device. If you are struggling with ABL, ask your medical provider about the possibility of trying an anal insert device.

Another group of researchers searched the medical literature for articles on ABL and diet. They found that very few studies have been done on the link between diet and ABL. And, the research that has been done concluded that dietary triggers vary by patient. The bottom line: individual foods rather than groups of foods appear to effect ABL. Use the chart of foods that patients report may cause or worsen ABL to help you identify your individual trigger foods. Don't restrict all of the foods on the chart. Instead, after trying individual foods, note your symptoms in a bowel diary. If you see an increase in episodes of ABL after eating a food, put it on a list of possible trigger foods. You may find that restricting trigger foods helps you to reduce ABL episodes.

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## PFDs in the News

- Senate committee deems concurrent surgeries unsafe, urges hospitals to ban them
- How new mothers can avoid injury when starting to exercise again
- Debunking myths about urinary incontinence
- Why do I get constipated when I go on a diet?
- Stay in the know with the Voices for PFD Mobile App.

## The Rest of the Story

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