



Oooops Moments! They don't have to be normal!

I am on a mission to break the 'taboo' over women's pelvic floor issues following childbirth.....or rather women's WEAK pelvic floor issues. Approximately 1 in 7 women suffer with bladder and/or bowel leakage post childbirth, however, we are still feeling embarrassed, alone and worst of all as if we have to "put up with it".

The latter statement is certainly not true and I want you all to take note and feel reassured that if you are suffering with either a bladder or bowel problem, there is help out there and ways to improve, if not completely solve your discomfort. As with most health matters, evidence shows that early intervention is key and can minimise long term damage to the pelvic floor muscles and reduce continence and prolapse later on in life.

My Story

So, let me take a brief moment to explain my own situation. After giving birth to Izzy, now 7 years old, I was suffering with discomfort from my bladder, occasionally leaking when sneezing/coughing and needing to go to the toilet much more frequently. I visited an outstanding Physiotherapist who specialised in Women's Health and in a very dignified and professional manner was informed I did indeed have a slight bladder prolapse. I had a handful of appointments where we would work on my pelvic floor technique (I will come back to this later on) and she would show me on the ultrasound scanner exactly what was going on.

Being in my early 20's at the time, I thought that I could manage this myself and that things would spring back to normal soon enough and so I stopped my appointments. Something I now regret, 6 years on and with a second child. Jack weighing 9lb 13 at birth certainly didn't help matters. I am now back on the books at the Physiotherapist and receiving treatment for a 'moderate cystocele bladder prolapse'. Something which can be improved without the need for surgery or any additional aids....just good old Pelvic Floor exercises, done often and more importantly, correctly.

Don't be Embarrassed

Embarrassment is a key reason as to why many women, including myself, ignore and put up with their symptoms and this needs to stop. I would bet that if you had a gathering of 5 of your mum friends and were to put your hand up and say "My bladder just isn't the same since having children", at least 3 of them would return with "Me too". It is no secret our bodies go through the most amazing transformations to grow and deliver a baby (or 2 or 3), therefore why should it be so surprising and hush hush that they also carry on these transformations post birth and do not necessarily look, function and process the way they used to.

It can be awkward of course, to meet a stranger and drop your knickers to be examined in the most private and personal area...which is why it is even more important that you seek the right help and feel comfortable with that person and their knowledge on that medical topic. Simply ignoring the problem could result in a much worse scenario and then it could be several strangers that you have fishing around down there to try and correct a bigger issue. I found my Physiotherapist to be very kind, knowledgeable and discreet and she put me at ease immediately. I left feeling happier in the

knowledge that she was experienced in the issue in hand, could help improve my symptoms without the need for invasive surgery and as if I could still look her in the eye if I bumped into her in Tesco.

It's all about Technique

OK, so going back to the Pelvic Floor exercises, did you know that 50% of women do not know how to perform a pelvic floor contraction correctly? They are putting in all the effort but sadly not doing anything to strengthen their pelvic muscles and often only do them for a short period of time following child birth and do not realise they need to carry these on as part of their daily routine from then on....a minimum being 6 months, as our bodies are still working very hard to repair themselves following pregnancy and delivery.

It isn't the easiest job to explain how to do a Pelvic Floor Contraction in words....but there will not be a video demo for this one, so will do my best.

Most people believe you just squeeze everything in all at the same time, hold, release and repeat. Well it isn't that simple, here's my how to:

- ❖ Breath – maintain a normal, steady breathing rhythm throughout
- ❖ Pull in from the bottom, across the vagina and up to the urethra (where we wee from)
- ❖ Use a slow, controlled motion- try and visualize the movement in the 3 steps above, going from one to the next
- ❖ Aim to hold for 4-5 seconds
- ❖ Release – slowly and in the reverse order to how you contracted
- ❖ Pause and repeat – aim for 10 contractions

This is how my Physiotherapist has explained to me and has me practicing 6 times a day. Obviously it is always best to get advice from a health professional based on your own needs, however the technique is key regardless if you do it once a day or 10 times a day.

Let's Spread the Word

I really hope by sharing my story and offering you an insight into the world of Women's Pelvic Floor health, that you will feel more comfortable to talk about your own symptoms and seek the correct medical help you need.....and deserve. You spent 9 months growing a baby, several arduous hours delivering them safely and endless hours nurturing them into the mini humans that they are, so now it is time to look after yourself and not suffer in silence. Share this with your friends and let's break this taboo once and for all.

Written by **The Gym Mummy**

Please read on to hear a short message from my own Physiotherapist, Katrina Wade, who will hopefully convince you further that these issues can be improved, that you are not alone and that help is available.

"I have been a Women's Health Specialist Physiotherapist for over 20 years and it is a role that I am very passionate about. I see many women of varying ages with bladder and bowel issues, prolapses and pelvic pain. Many of them have taken several years to pluck up the courage to go and see someone. Some come to me desperate, in the hope that something may be done to help them, often having been told by their GP that their issues are 'normal' because they have children or because of their age. Adverts for continence pads do not help, just telling women to put a pad in and get your life back!

I would urge you ladies to go and seek professional help as these problems are NOT normal and something CAN be done to help you.

Please do not suffer in silence."

Katrina Wade

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