

## **PHYSIOTHERAPY AND WOMEN'S HEALTH**

Chartered Physiotherapists help women throughout their lives, such as during:

<b>Adolescence:</b>	Pelvic Floor Education General Exercise - Prevention of Osteoporosis and Back Pain Treatment of Spinal Disorders Treatment of Urinary Incontinence
<b>Childbearing Years:</b>	Antenatal and Postnatal Education Pregnancy Associated Musculoskeletal Disorders Symphysis Pubis Dysfunction / Diastasis Recti Urinary and Faecal Incontinence Perineal Complications / Pain
<b>Menopausal Years the Elderly:</b>	General exercise for decreased Mobility, Osteoporosis and Back Pain Back Care Musculoskeletal Disorders secondary to Osteoporosis Pelvic Floor Education and Treatment of Urinary and Faecal Incontinence

### **Incontinence - The Facts**

One in four Irish women are at risk of suffering from urinary incontinence at some stage in their lives. It is often considered to be part of the normal ageing process about which nothing can be done. This is not so. Incontinence has definite causes and can be treated.

#### **What is incontinence?**

It is an unwanted leakage from the bladder or bowel which can happen at unsociable times and in inappropriate places. It can be an embarrassing problem which many women may find hard to talk about. There are many things which can be done to help this problem.

#### **Types of incontinence**

##### **Stress incontinence**

This type of incontinence is characterised by leakage of urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or make sudden movements. Weakness of the pelvic floor muscles is the main cause of this type of incontinence, and the most common cause of weakness is damage to the muscles resulting from childbirth or surgery.

##### **Urge incontinence**

There is a strong need to pass urine which if ignored may lead to leaking. The most common cause is urinary infection, but may be due to physical irritation from a number of causes e.g. Cystitis, Bladder stones and Oestrogen deficiency following the menopause.

Some people may have a combination of both stress and urge incontinence

#### **The Cause**

Labour and delivery can stretch the muscles which maintain continence. Factors which may increase this damage include, large babies, successive deliveries and perhaps long deliveries.

### **Treatments available**

There are a number of ways the problem can be treated. Most involve simply exercising the pelvic floor muscles. These help to improve continence, are quite simple to do and are very effective.

PHOTO HERE

### **Pelvic Floor Exercises**

The pelvic floor muscles are located along the floor of the pelvis. They support the pelvic organs and control the outlet from them. These muscles can become weak especially due to childbirth and this may cause the leakage of urine. Like any other muscles in the body the more you use them the stronger they become. The programme of exercises specifically suited to you can be given by your chartered physiotherapist.

### **Vaginal Cones**

These are weighted cones which come in various sizes and weights. Advice should be sought from a chartered physiotherapist before using cones.

### **Neuromuscular Stimulation**

Neuromuscular stimulation delivers small comfortable electronic signals to the pelvic floor muscles causing them to contract when you are not able to do so voluntarily. The electrodes may be placed internally in the vagina or externally on the perineum. This treatment is available in a Physiotherapy Department and home units are also available. Assessment is required before using a home unit.

### **Biofeedback**

Biofeedback units use an internal electrode to record either pressure or electrical signals from you pelvic floor. The electrode is inserted in the vagina and the pelvic floor muscles tighten around it. The level of the contraction is then displayed in a visual scale.

### **Home Treatment**

Neuromuscular Stimulation devices and Biofeedback units are currently available to rent in Ireland. Private Health Insurance companies will provide cover in most cases. Some health boards may provide cover - it's worth asking.