



Physio may cure incontinence

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By Deborah Condon

Physiotherapy is effective in treating stress incontinence in as many as 80% of cases, the results of a new study indicate.

Incontinence is an uncontrollable and involuntary loss of bladder control. With stress incontinence, a small amount of urine escapes when a person sneezes, coughs, laughs or partakes in physical exertion, such as straining to pick something heavy up or exercising. It is common in women, particularly following childbirth.

In such cases, physiotherapy focuses on training the pelvic floor muscles.

Researchers in Australia set out to determine how effective physiotherapy could be in curing stress incontinence. They looked at 274 women affected by the condition, all of whom were aged between 23 and 77. They were taught pelvic floor muscle training by specialist continence physiotherapists.



"Being able to understand how to contract the pelvic floor muscles the right way is essential for a successful outcome. About one-third of women who are given a brochure about pelvic floor exercises, get the basic action wrong and do not do well on their own with the training", said researcher Trish Neumann, a PhD student in physiotherapy at the University of South Australia.

The participants had an average of five training sessions over several months, as well as a monitored home programme.

The study found that the majority of those involved were either cured or they experienced a significant improvement in their condition. After one year, 80% indicated that they were still happy with the outcome of the treatment. Altogether, just 15 of the women went on to have surgery.

"Age is not a factor in the success of treatment, but maintaining a strong pelvic floor once the muscles have been strengthened with regular exercise built into their daily lives, is the key to long-term success. Exercise takes very little time and can be done at times that suit participants and as part of their everyday activities", Ms Neumann explained.

She pointed out that one of the problems for women with stress incontinence is that they leak urine during sport. This can discourage them from exercising, which compounds the problem as they may stop being active, lose fitness, get depressed, eat more and put on weight.

Ms Neumann also highlighted the fact that physiotherapy is just as useful for men with stress incontinence. Such problems are most common in men after they have undergone prostate surgery.

For more information on stress incontinence, click on...

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