

## GENESIS OB/GYN, INC.

### THE LITTLE MUSCLE THAT MATTERS

*If a weak pelvic muscle is sabotaging orgasm, these simple exercises may restore joy to your life.*

Here's good news about making love. For women who have difficulty achieving orgasm, there may be a solution: a series of simple exercises - not costly therapy. For men, these exercises seem to make erections easier and increase control of orgasm. That report comes from psychiatrist Lucy R. Waletzky, co-director of the Medical Illness Counseling Center in Chevy Chase, MD.

Among women, lack of orgasm during intercourse is so common - from 33% to 80% of all women - that many doctors don't consider it a sexual dysfunction. Dr. Waletzky says she and others have now confirmed that ability to have orgasm correlates with the contraction strength of the pubococcygeus, or PC muscle.

Although the PC muscle is interwoven with and surrounded by four other sets of pelvic muscles, it is the master muscle of the pelvis, slung like a hammock from front to back. When healthy and fit, it holds a taut straight line. When it is weak, the PC and the pelvic organs it supports tend to sag, which can lead to urinary incontinence and sexual problems. Pregnancy especially stretches the PC muscle.

Using a special muscle tester called an EMG Perineometer, Waletzky tested the PC strength of 80 healthy women ages 20 to 80. She found that women who don't experience orgasm at all tend to have weak PC contractions on a 10-second 'hold' test. Women who experience orgasm only from direct stimulation of the clitoris tend to have slightly stronger PC muscles. And women who experience orgasm or multiple orgasms during intercourse are stronger still - in this test, from 2-5 times stronger than women who don't experience orgasm. This study confirms the findings of psychologist John Perry, the inventor of the EMG Perineometer.

A taut PC won't compensate for psychological problems or poor technique, cautions Waletzky. However, in many cases 15 minutes of exercises each day for a month or more can strengthen the PC muscle and enable previously anorgasmic women to have orgasm during intercourse.

### SMALL TRIUMPHS AGAINST DISEASE

At her Medical Illness Counseling Center, Waletzky and her therapeutic teams do clinical work and research on the psychopathology of chronic diseases - the emotional problems caused by being sick all the time. Whether a patient has terminal cancer or mild diabetes,

the center's aim is to help a man or a woman regain as much as possible of what makes life worth living. Among the sick, she finds the loss of sexual satisfaction to be clinically very important. Word is beginning to spread. Care professionals in medical centers around the country now call Waletzky for guidance on this type of therapy.

A 56 year old woman with uterine cancer had a hysterectomy and radiation therapy. At first, she was anorgasmic and suffered pain on intercourse, as well as recurring vaginal urinary tract infections. The pain and infections stopped soon after she started the PC exercises. After eight months, she had doubled her PC strength - and, as a result, experienced orgasm during intercourse.

As Waletzky says, 'Orgasm is an important part of optimal physical and emotional health for everyone. Further research is needed to clarify how many PC exercises are needed - apparently men need fewer than women - and their place in regular sex therapy. In the meantime, this exercise treatment is free, simple and may do a world of good.'

### NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY

Though Waletzky's PC research has focused on women, her clinical experience with a few male patients suggests similar benefits from PC strengthening.

Bernie Zilbergeld, an Oakland, CA, psychologist formerly with the University of California's Human Sexuality Program, tried the exercises himself and found the results 'interesting' - so interesting that he began recommending the exercise program to his patients.

Dr. William E. Hartman and Marilyn Fithian, sex researchers and co-directors of the Center for Marital and Sexual Studies, Long Beach, CA, report that PC exercises alone can make erections possible or more frequent, and increase sexual endurance for 50% of the men who come to their clinic.

The PC or 'Kegel', exercises grew out of research on incontinence. In 1952, a University of Southern California gynecologist, Arnold Kegel, developed a series of exercises for patients undergoing surgery for bladder control. These were PC-muscle exercises. They proved so effective that he prescribed them not only after surgery for gynecological or urinary problems, but as an alternative to it (see 'Help for Stress Incontinence').

A joyful side effect was that after doing PC exercises, some patients experienced orgasm during intercourse for the first time, or more easily than ever. Kegel reported in a clinical study - one without a control group - that 78% of 123 women who completed the exercise program had orgasms during intercourse for the first time. The exercises seemed to give them more sensation in their vaginas.

Over the years, physicians have identified at least 18 more gynecological and obstetrical conditions - including urinary tract infections and menstrual cramps - that can be relieved or cured simply by exercising the muscle a few minutes a day. The relief results in part from fitter, more relaxed pelvic muscles, increased blood circulation and better sensory awareness in the region.

'It only takes a little practice,' says Dr. Fred Weaver III at Martin Luther King Hospital in Los Angeles. 'The exercises can be done unobtrusively while sitting at a desk, waiting for a bus, driving a car, waiting in line or watching a movie. I recommend that all of my patients incorporate them into their health regime.'

Once you start the exercises, it will take about 15 minutes a day for at least 3 weeks before you can expect the first signs of the control you will later achieve. Stay with it. The benefits to general health and well-being can be tremendous.

### THE PC PROGRAM

PC exercises are simple - maybe too simple. They are deceptive, both because these minor movements can have such major health consequences and because it is easy to work the wrong muscle. Test to properly identify the PC. Repeat the test often as you work through the program.

**ISOLATE THE MUSCLE:** Sit on the toilet, spread your legs as far as possible, and start and stop the flow of urine. For both women and men, the PC muscle is the only one that can accomplish this. Start and stop the flow three times to set the PC action in your mind. Then empty the bladder completely. To make sure of working the right muscle while exercising, women can insert a finger into the vagina and feel the contractions. If you are still not sure, Dr. Perry will tell you where to find a local testing facility with an EMG Perineometer. Call 800-537-3779.

**FLICKS:** In time to a fast beat - such as the beat of your heart - contract and release your PC muscle. Be sure you can feel when the muscle relaxes and when it contracts.

**HOLDS:** Maximally contract the PC and hold for 10 seconds.

**BEAR DOWNS:** Bear down for 3 seconds; relax and repeat. This particular Kegel is not advised for women with pelvic weakness problems.

**GRADUAL HOLDS:** Slowly over 10 seconds contract the PC muscle to maximum, and slowly over 10 seconds reduce the tension.

For best results, do these exercises for a total of 15 minutes every day and follow Waletzky's weekly program outlined here. To chart your progress, write down any changes you notice in sexual response, urinary symptoms, emotions or images. For increased sexual response, you might practice these exercises during intercourse.

### **PC COACHING**

PC exercises can be another daily burden, like flossing your teeth, or an enjoyable way to relax. We have found that PC contractions work well as a soothing and health internal 'mantra'. To help coach women and men to stronger, healthier PC muscles, American Health has produced a special relaxation audio tape: PC Exercises for Better Sex. To order: Send \$9.95 per tape plus \$1.90 shipping to PC tape, American Health, P. O. Box 2830, Hendersonville, NC 28793-2830. Allow six to eight weeks for delivery.

### **HELP FOR STRESS INCONTINENCE**

Laughing so hard you wet your pants is one of those amusing but embarrassing moments that we don't generally worry about - until it takes just a small laugh, a sneeze or a slight strain from lifting to trigger the spillage. Others find that as they grow older, their bladders seem to shrink. It forces them to urinate frequently and makes an uninterrupted night's sleep impossible.

Both problems may stem from a gradual weakening of the pelvic floor. That sagging alters the relationship between the bladder and the urethra, which allows urine to leak and can make the bladder seem smaller. All too often, people suffer these symptoms silently - letting the muscles slowly deteriorate until submitting finally to diapers or surgery.

It doesn't have to be that way. A growing body of research indicates that regular PC exercises may help prevent stress incontinence and 'shrinking' bladders - cure the symptoms. If you suffer urinary leakage, consult your doctor to make sure muscle weakness is the only problem, then begin the exercises.

If incontinence requires such special help as sanitary clothing, send for HIP's 'Resource Guide of Continence Aids and Services' (\$3)

HIP - Help for Incontinent People - is a not-for-profit information clearinghouse. Write HIP Resource Guides, P. O. Box 544, Union, SC 29739.