

My doctor said I need pelvic floor physical therapy — now what?

By Meagan Peeters-Gebler, DPT, CSCS, CMTPT



Questions about your first appointment with a pelvic physical therapist (PPT) are common. PPTs are aware of this and — rest assured — your initial visit is typically spent calming your nerves. PPTs hear many similar stories each day, and you should not be afraid to share yours with them.

Before your initial evaluation, you will be asked to complete a thorough questionnaire about your problem(s), activities, limitations, medical history, diet and fluid intake, exercise, urinary and bowel function, and your obstetric history. While these forms may seem time consuming and personal, they provide your PPT with

valuable information that will help create an accurate picture of your individual story. Any information you share on your form will be discussed with your PPT in a private treatment room.

During your first visit, your PPT will discuss details of what you have tried so far, what surgeries or procedures you've

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“Problems in your pelvis influence your most important functions.”

had, medications, your general health and your activity level. The goal here is to discover any triggers that make your problem better or worse. Problems in your pelvis influence your most important functions. You will discuss how often you go to the bathroom, if you have pain when you urinate or have a bowel movement, and any effects on your sexual health.


Using these discussions, you and your PPT will determine your goals for physical therapy. The goals of pelvic physical therapy are things such as pain-free bowel movements, or being able to complete any of the following: have intercourse without pain, go to Zumba without the fear of leaking urine, sit through your child’s recital without having to get up to go to the bathroom, or tolerating your ride home from work without increased pelvic pain. The goals of pelvic physical therapy are specific to you and based on your life activities.

In addition to being empathetic listeners, PPTs are the medical experts of the musculoskeletal system, movement and function. The pelvis is a complicated system of bones, ligaments, muscles, nerves, organs and connective tissues. PPTs have advanced training in the anatomy and physiology of the pelvis, urinary and bowel functions, pregnancy, and sexual health. During your examination, your PPT will assess your posture, flexibility, strength, breathing mechanics and biomechanics for your entire body. Additionally, they will evaluate your movements and examine your muscles and bones (typically through your trunk, hips and legs). Based upon your discussion and examination, your PPT will determine the cause of your problem and identify any impairment that might be contributing to it.

After your evaluation, your PPT will describe types of treatments that would be the most beneficial, and explain the pros and cons of each. Together with you will collaborate to determine a plan that fits you. Treatment will typically begin at your first visit. Treatment may include hands-on techniques to your bones or muscle, or exercises that you will continue at home. Most often, it is a combination of both.

At your second visit (occasionally at your initial visit), your PPT will determine if an internal pelvic examination is necessary. Due to the location of the pelvic floor muscle, the best way to evaluate and treat them is internally. This is done through the vagina in females and the rectum in males. PPT examinations differ from medical exams. During the exam, a speculum is not used for women. PPTs are evaluating the pelvic floor muscles, joints, ligaments, fascia, connective tissue and nerves — not

the reproductive, urinary, or intestinal organs or systems. The PPT’s assessment determines what areas are painful; if there are muscle spasms or tightness present; the strength, endurance and coordination of your pelvic floor; and the flexibility of any scar tissue that may be present.

Pelvic pain or incontinence is not something you have to live with. Hopefully a better understanding of pelvic floor physical therapy will encourage you to make a change. 



Meagan Peeters-Gebler is a women’s health physical therapist with Orthopedic & Spine Therapy (OST). Meagan received her doctorate in physical therapy from Marquette University in 2006 and is certified in pelvic physical therapy by the American Physical Therapy Association’s Section on Women’s Health. She is also a certified strength and conditioning specialist. To make an appointment with Meagan, please call 920-968-0814. She is located in Appleton, 4000 N. Providence Ave. OST is privately owned and is celebrating 25 years serving Wisconsin.



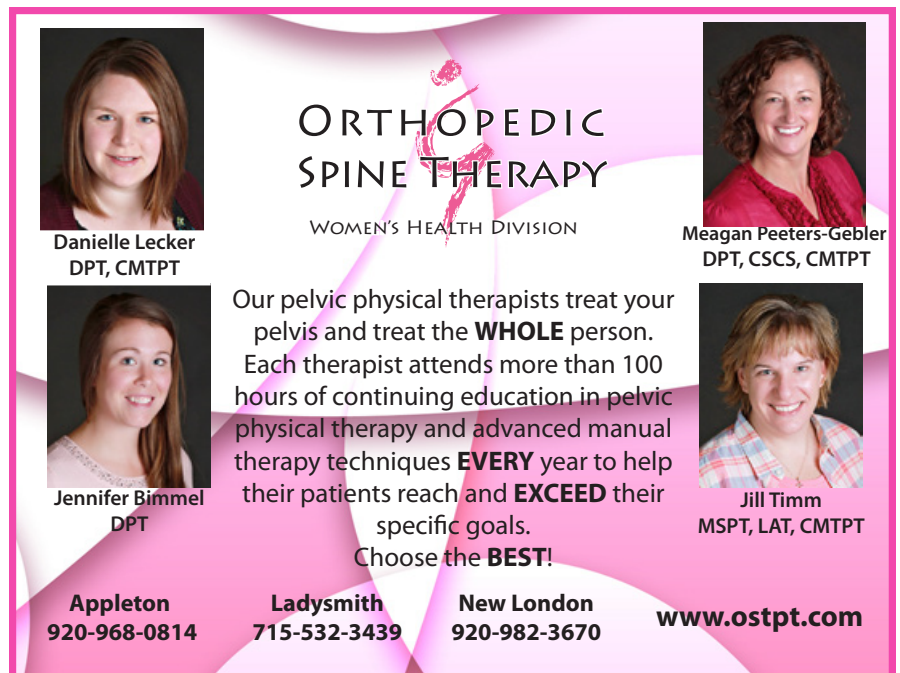
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