

PELVIC FLOOR HEALTH

BY MIA MUNROE

MAINSTREAM exercise has never been an option for me. I enjoyed a 10-year career as a professional classical ballet dancer. As I approached my 30s, my injured body needed to heal through more mindful exercise.

As I entered into my 40's, teaching exercise and spinal strengthening had regained and sustained my overall physique but my own state of mind and quality of life was truly dictated by my own inner pelvic health.

Naturally becoming a close confidant of my clients, I began to hear various stories of dissatisfaction with pelvic functioning. To my surprise, stories filled with pain and dysfunction did not come solely from older women with children. I was hearing all types of unimaginable abnormalities silently being accepted as normal - from women of all ages.

INSPIRATION

There was one common complaint from the very beginning of my career as a trainer: "Kegels are not helping my pelvic floor!"

Inspired to help, as I could not imagine coping with the suffering I was hearing, I returned to school to find some answers. At the University of Washington, I learned that not only are women doing way too much of the wrong things, the majority are doing nothing at all!

Teaching my common sense techniques at a prenatal yoga studio proved early on to be in line with what is necessary for all women—mindful check-ins throughout the day to relax unknown tension and learning how to "Un-Kegel." This is the heart of my technique.

COMMON PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTIONS

It is with blind faith that we take our pelvic functioning for granted—until that day when something unexpectedly goes wrong.

Mechanical malfunctions of the bladder include not making it to the toilet because of little or no notice, not emptying completely, or sometimes, nothing coming at all, even when internal feedback says otherwise. Not facing these issues can lead to having no control whatsoever, chronic pain and/or infection.

Statistically speaking, the silent epidemics are bladder, intestinal, vaginal, and rectal prolapse. With or without over-training one's pelvic floor, prolapse (a shifting or downward displacement of our pelvic organs) can happen after childbirth or in years following. Prolapse can be hereditary, and it is potentially something your grandmother or mother never talked about. This feeling of downward pressure can also occur at any time after a full or partial hysterectomy, when there is no longer enough internal pressures to support the organs.



WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY

The pelvic floor is autonomous. Do not micromanage it! With adequate circulation and ventilation, your vagina is a self-healing mechanism. Purchase jeans that fit well and don't cut off circulation to the most sensitive and well-loved areas of your body.

In addition, your inner pelvis is a self-cleaning oven with its own complex internal environment. No douching, please! A small amount of apple cider in a sitz bath will balance your pH naturally. Also, avoid pads that are scented and tampons containing pesticides. Only organic products deserve to be neighboring your sensitive tissues.

Avoid "power peeing," or pushing anything down and out when it's not necessary. (Sorry, moms! The kids will be fine for another few seconds). On the other hand, do not force yourself to go when there is no need. And, if you have to go and must wait, there are postural tools that can take the pressure off your bladder. Try lifting your shoulders and your rib cage upwards on the way to the bathroom! Your bladder may need just a little bit less pressure from up above.

And the big one: Alfred Kegel worked with patients primarily using a perineometer—a small balloon used to measure vaginal strength, still used in physical therapy today. 'Kegeling' around nothing (I've heard when sitting at a stoplight or standing in line at the supermarket) simply results in a tight, tired,

and weakened pelvic floor. Consider the dissatisfaction of chewing with nothing in your mouth. Is it not logical that the pelvic floor muscles should ideally be trained while maintaining the shape they were meant to be used for during conception?

Sexual dysfunction or lack of sexual activity altogether is often easier (but not impossible) to ignore. Through increased circulation, our pelvic floors are self-healing mechanisms. Some private independent homework can help maintain inner and outer tissue health through regular activity. This will sustain and thicken vaginal walls, which, in turn, can lower your risk of incontinence and prolapse.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Tragically, the muscles of the pelvis in both women and men can unknowingly hold onto early dysfunction, driven by physical and/or emotional abuse.

Throughout early and middle adulthood, the pelvic area will adapt to chronic tension. Functioning can be misconstrued as reliable enough. Lost conceptions and traumas of childbirth can be forgotten in the joys of motherhood, masking early warnings of inflammation and chronic pain that reveal themselves later in life.

Within these unconscious compensatory skills, false certainty will

convince any woman that the pelvis will always perform as it's meant to—not the case in an unrepresented growing population.

A BODY REMEMBERS AND CAN RELEARN

Consider the reasons for the accumulation of tension and pain may have been long accepted and emotionally resolved but the pelvic floor muscles can retain long-term physical memories that will eventually release with adequate attention to relaxation and circulation. Relaxed lower abdominals, attention to properly balanced sitting, and correct posture are what maintain pelvic floor decompression. Pelvic floor muscles can then learn to strengthen naturally by simply breathing deeply.

Practicing some self-empowering homework, as its own valuable exercise, and/or utilizing a pelvic floor physical therapist can help facilitate discovery of the true state of our beloved pelvic floors.

Each individual pelvic floor is unique and unpredictable. Past traumas or not, any unwelcome change to your pelvic functioning warrants immediate attention with an educated and proactive approach. Stay in tune with your pelvic floor because dysfunction has no place in one of the most precious areas of the body.

Mia Munroe, native of Michigan, recently opened Movement In Action, located on Front Street above Talbot's in downtown Traverse City. MIA is Traverse City's first GYROTONIC® studio, offering private and small group training, specializing in pelvic floor health. MIA's grand opening will be Saturday, Sept. 21. Contact Mia@MiaTraverseCity.com if you would like to attend or make an appointment. Mia also teaches group classes in the GYROKINESIS® Method and pelvic floor workshops at various locations around Traverse City.