



Loving and laughing through life

With pelvic strength comes confidence. A strong pelvic floor can help improve certain conditions and increase sexual satisfaction. So keep your pelvic floor and your confidence healthy. If you are experiencing symptoms, don't wait until your annual exam or Pap test. Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider.

Studies show that one-third of women suffer from one or more pelvic floor disorders. "The Pelvic Floor" is a term used to describe the muscles, ligaments, and connective tissue that provide support for a woman's internal organs.

Common Disorders include:

Urinary incontinence – inability to control the release of urine

Fecal incontinence – loss of bowel control

Constipation – infrequent or difficult bowel movements

Pelvic organ prolapse – organs fallen from normal position and protruding from vagina or anus

The **Female Reproductive System** includes organs involved in producing offspring. In women, this system includes the ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, and vagina.

Common Disorders include:

Fibroids - benign growths in the muscle of the uterus, not associated with an increased risk of cancer

Ovarian cysts - fluid-filled sacs within, or on the surface of an ovary

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) - common hormone imbalance in the brain and ovaries that affects 1 in 10 women

Endometriosis - uterine lining growing outside the uterus

Pelvic pain - pain in the pelvic area or lower abdomen that can radiate to the lower back and thighs

Sexual dysfunction - inability to physically or emotionally enjoy sexual intercourse

Preventive measures to maintain overall pelvic health include:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Quit smoking
- Eat nutritiously
- Exercise regularly
- Perform pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegels - repeatedly squeezing and releasing the muscles of your pelvic floor)
- Have an annual gynecological exam and Pap test

Factors that can increase your risk for pelvic issues include:

- Increased age
- Lifting heavy objects
- Multiple vaginal deliveries
- Genetically predisposed
- Certain medications or conditions

Cancers Affecting Pelvic Health

Ovarian Cancer

There is often a lack of early symptoms or screenings.

Symptoms include pelvic pain, bloated abdomen, nausea, and constipation.

Risk factors: most women who develop ovarian cancer are not considered at high risk for it. However, chances are increased with personal or family history of breast, uterine or colorectal cancer.

Uterine Cancer (endometrial and uterine sarcoma)

Symptoms include abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge, difficult urination, and pain.

Risk factors: increasing age, endometrial hyperplasia, estrogen use, obesity, and Caucasian.

Cervical Cancer

Most commonly caused by HPV infection – get vaccinated!

Symptoms include abnormal vaginal bleeding, longer and heavier periods, and pelvic pain.

Your risk is further increased by lack of regular Pap tests, smoking, weakened immune system, and many sexual partners.

REFERENCES:

The Office on Women's Health, www.womenshealth.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov
US Department of Health & Human Services, www.hhs.gov
National Cancer Institute, www.cancer.gov

Gynecological Cancer is any cancer that starts in a woman's reproductive organs.

Each gynecologic cancer is unique, with different signs and symptoms, different risk factors (things that may increase your chance of getting a disease), and different prevention strategies. All women are at risk for gynecologic cancers and risk increases with age. When gynecologic cancers are found early, treatment is most effective.