

Physical therapy techniques can help alleviate women's incontinence

Experts say that 25 million adult Americans experience transient or chronic urinary incontinence. Of those people, 75 to 80 percent are women. Many people believe that incontinence is a normal part of aging and do not seek help. The fact is that incontinence is a treatable problem.

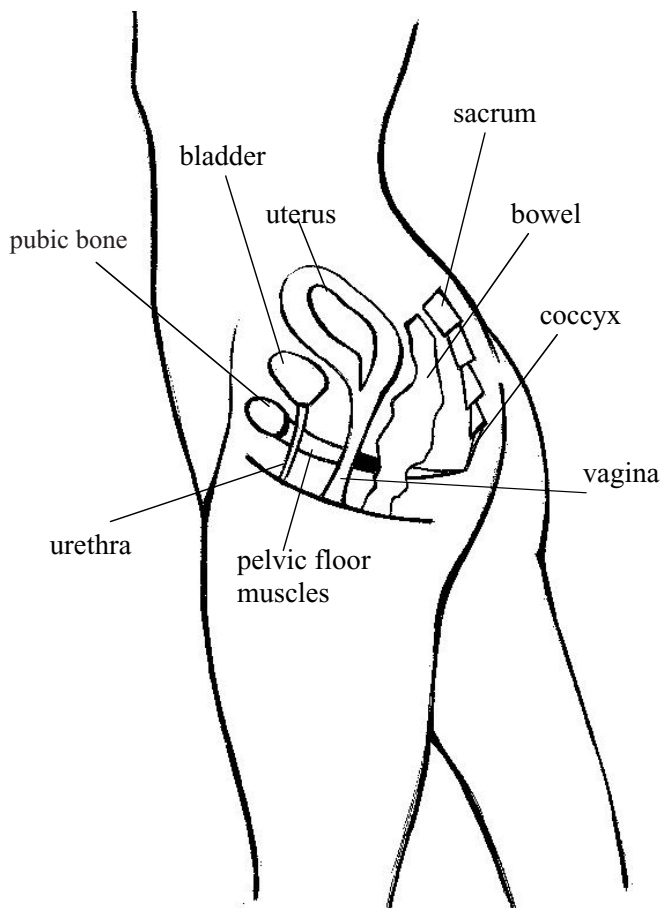
Incontinence is defined as the involuntary loss of bladder or bowel control. This, combined with urgency and frequency of urination, can lead to disruption of your life. According to the American Physical Therapy Association there are two types of incontinence – stress and urge incon-

tinence – that benefit from physical therapy.

Stress incontinence occurs when there is an involuntary loss of urine with physical activity such as sneezing or exercising. Weak pelvic floor muscles are often the culprit for this leakage.

Urge incontinence can be described as leakage that occurs with a very strong need to urinate. Often the person may feel the need to rush to the bathroom. This form of incontinence is often due to irritation of the bladder.

After a healthcare provider has completed an examination and performed tests to deter-



Physical therapy can strengthen weak pelvic floor muscles to help resolve stress incontinence. *Illustration by Logan Samuelson*



mine the cause of incontinence, he or she determines the best treatment. Options may include medication, physical therapy or surgery.

A physical therapist designs an individualized program for incontinence treatment depending on the person's specific problems. Weakness in pelvic floor muscles requires strengthening to prevent leakage with physical activity (i.e. laughing, getting out of a chair). Sometimes it is hard to know if you are contracting the correct muscles when doing these strengthening exercises. In this case, biofeedback is used to read the amount of activity in the pelvic floor muscles and displays it for you

to see.

To speed up the strengthening process, electrical stimulation of the pelvic floor muscles may also be performed. Electrical impulses help contract the muscles as you contract them at the same time.

Finally, if leakage occurs with a strong urge to use the bathroom, a person may need to make dietary changes or do bladder retraining to decrease bladder irritation.

In the end, it is important to remember that incontinence is not something that you should have to live with. Talking to your doctor about the problem is the first step to getting help.

Horizon Physical Therapy