

Pelvic floor release exercises with vaginismus

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Pelvic floor (PF) drops

- Who has heard of PF drops, reverse Kegels or pelvic floor release exercises?
- Who uses them?
- They were not mentioned in my original PST training about 15 years ago
- I originally heard about them from a Psychosexual Therapist who worked in a multi-disciplinary clinic in Cambridge nearly 10 years ago
- The idea made sense and has proved useful in my therapy
- But I have discussed it with my Physio colleague and have not been able to find an evidence base
- So this is largely ANECDOTAL – practical tips that have helped my therapy

Traditional psychosexual therapy (PST) for vaginismus

- Masters and Johnson (1970)
 - “Demonstrated” the involuntary vaginal spasm to “both marital partners”
 - Then the husband did “dilation” in the “marital bed-room”
 - Once the largest size could be introduced, retained intravaginally for several hours each night
 - all 29 women “recovered”
- By 2005, my training focussed on :
 - Recognising the feeling of vaginal tension/spasm using PF contractions
 - The woman using the dilators (or fingers) alone
 - Gradually desensitising to penile-vaginal contact, then penetration

Now at Chandos, usually in first session ...

- Already had physical examination to exclude a specific disorder and sometimes identify the PF spasm
- Assessment / history take
- Explain the “stretchy vagina” and PF spasms
- What imagery do others use to explain the vagina?

Now at Chandos, usually in first session ...

- Breathing for relaxation (in for 7, out for 11)
- PF exercises (contract for 3, relax/release for 6)
- Decide if going to work with fingers or trainers and agree first insertion/penetration goals

But...

- Some need to go much more slowly, largely due to very high levels of anxiety
e.g. initial goal to just touch genitals
- Some cannot seem to insert anything without pain (even cotton bud) – I conceptualise this as the PF muscles not relaxing
- So they may need extra help to relax/release the PF,

ENTER...

PF drops

Pelvic Health Solutions - Reverse Kegels/Pelvic Floor Drops

...The feeling of dropping your pelvic floor is similar to the moment of relief when you have reached the bathroom; when you urinate or have a bowel movement, you first drop your pelvic floor, and let the pelvic floor muscles (PFM) go. Pay attention to this, and see if you can feel that happening. The key to dropping your pelvic floor is **visualization**, and deep breathing...

In order to do a reverse kegel, start by gently contracting your pelvic floor to feel what tightening the muscles feels like. Now relax, and let that tension go. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Try to go one step further now, and visualize that the muscles between the pubic bone and tailbone lengthen...

It is helpful to take a mirror to look at your contraction and relaxation. When you perform a pelvic floor contraction (Kegel) a woman's clitoris should move slightly downward, her anus should wink, and the perineal body (area between the vagina and anus) should move up and in...On the reverse Kegel, you should see the anus release and your perineal body move downwards towards the mirror. It should also feel like you are creating more space between the pubic bone and tailbone. Don't make it happen, visualize and let it happen!

Eventually, once you have mastered the art of relaxing your pelvic floor muscles, you will need to check in with your pelvic floor throughout the day, and let go of any tension that you discover.

Key points

- DO NOT bear down or strain – it is *similar to* the feeling when you urinate or open your bowels
- Need to use visualisation
 - Lengthening the PF
 - NOT an elevator (if ground floor is resting tone, and first floor is contracted, the basement would be bearing down)
 - Can use verbal prompts, e.g. “Release and let go, release more, any more...”

PST vs Physiotherapy

- I have a very different role
 - More of a lay-person's view
 - Working “blind”
 - Teaching self-help
- Cannot refer all women who have initial difficulties to physiotherapy
- BUT I must not do any harm

PF release exercises and breathing

- Complicated!
- Maeve Whelan's "sniff flop drop"
 - Audible, sustained in-breath (sniff) causes diaphragm to descend
 - The abdomen releases outwards (flop)
 - The PF lets go (drop)
- I do not teach this!

PF release exercises and breathing

- The opposite can also lead to abdominal distension and PF drop, e.g.
 - Blowing forcefully
 - Coughing
 - Laughing
- I sometimes get women to try these ideas and focus on their PF to get a feeling of what the PF release feels like
- But these manoeuvres cannot be sustained without potentially leading to bearing down

To finish

- I find PF drops, reverse Kegels or pelvic floor release exercises a useful adjunct to the more traditional PF exercises
- It seems that for some women the absence of tension is not sufficient – it helps them to have something active to focus on

References

Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. E. (1970). *Human sexual inadequacy*. Bantam Books.

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