

A Problem “Down There”: Pelvic Floor Disorders Demystified

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Common pelvic floor disorders:

Stress Urinary Incontinence

Loss of urine that happens at the same time as physical exertion. Activities like sneezing, coughing, or exercise increase the pressure or “stress” on the bladder. This pushes urine out of the body. This is a problem with the urethra, the tube that drains the bladder.

Overactive Bladder and Urgency Urinary Incontinence

Characterized by a sudden urge to urinate, the urge to go frequently, and awakening at night more than once to pee. When OAB leads to leakage before reaching the restroom, this is called urgency urinary incontinence. OAB is a bladder (not urethra) problem.

Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Occurs when the pelvic floor muscles and connective tissue weaken or tear. This causes the pelvic organs to fall downward into the vagina, similar to a hernia. Women may feel or see tissue coming out of the opening of the vagina as this progresses.

Online Resources:

<https://www.voicesforpfd.org/>

- Patient education website run by the American Urogynecologic Society, with FAQs, glossary, videos from clinicians, tools for patients.

<https://www.augs.org/patient-fact-sheets/>

- Reliable information, each written for a specific condition or treatment. Written by MDs (including me) for patients. Available large print.

<https://www.yourpelvicfloor.org/leaflets/>

- Similar to above but in 17 languages. From the International Urogynecological Association.