

**Pelvicfloor.nz**

## **Experts answer our questions about pelvic floor health.**

In order to help people understand the fundamental aspects of pelvic floor health, and who is at risk of pelvic floor dysfunction, pelvicfloor.nz spoke to two very knowledgeable specialists and asked them a few questions.

Vicki Zumbraegel is a REPS Registered Certified Personal Trainer, and a Registered Nurse, and Lynda Lovatt is a REPS Registered Personal trainer with a special interest in pregnancy, post-natal fitness menopause. Both have a keen interest in, and extensive knowledge of, pelvic floor issues/ health.

Our questions are followed by their individual answers.

### **Question 1:**

**Why is it important for people who exercise to be aware of pelvic floor health?**

Lynda:

- 1) Your core needs to be as strong as the exercise you wish to undertake.
- 2) The pelvic floor is a muscle that needs to be strengthened just like any other muscle.
- 3) The pelvic floor muscle works hard to keep your pelvic organs in place everyday. It helps prevent leaking of urine and bowel motions when it is nice and strong and helps maintain good sexual function.

4) The side effects of having a weak pelvic floor are not nice and can be embarrassing and affect one's quality of life.

5) Some exercises or activities can make you pelvic floor worse.

Vicki:

- It is important for people who exercise to be aware of pelvic floor health because the side effects of pelvic floor dysfunction can be embarrassing, socially debilitating, financially expensive (pads cost a lot) and have a downward spiral on your health and wellbeing, if you cannot continue to be active.

- Your pelvic floor has wonderful functional everyday roles for maintaining continence, helping to empty our bladder and bowel, helping to support our organs and the openings of our bladder, uterus and bowel, helping to maintain abdominal pressure, and of course helping with sexual responses.

- Pelvic Floor muscles are part of a system, they are part of your core muscles. They all work together and implementing them into your fitness programme in a safe manner is integral to your entire fitness, health and wellbeing.

- It is important to know that there are some exercises that may worsen existing pelvic floor issues or may cause pelvic floor dysfunction.

## **Question 2**

### **What kind of exercise can affect the pelvic floor and what are the risks?**

Vicki:

- Mostly, any kind of high impact exercise can affect the pelvic floor by increasing abdominal pressure which pushes down on to the pelvic floor organs and muscles and may cause a weakness of some kind like a prolapse or continence issue. For instance, running downhill, aerobics, boot camps and skipping to name a few.

- Exercise that uses heavy weights can cause increased intra-abdominal pressure too especially if you tend to hold your breath on exertion.
- Some gym machines can also affect the pelvic floor like the leg press with a heavy weight as it causes a bearing down pressure on the pelvic floor.
- Likewise so can exercises like crunches, double leg lowering, body weight exercises like full planks and full press ups.

Some women find that exercises like wide legged, deep squats will also present an issue in itself!

Continence NZ has produced a booklet titled 'Promoting Pelvic Floor Safe Exercise' : this is available to fitness professionals. REPs (NZ Register of Exercise Professionals) also has a "Tell Me More" leaflet called "The Core and Pelvic Floor" that is available to REPs Personal Trainers to use as a tool and a resource for their clients to help inform and educate them about "safe" and

"unsafe" exercises and the importance of training and protecting their pelvic floor.

These will help decrease the risks of prolapse issues of the bladder, uterus or bowel or continence issues of the bladder or bowel - AND decrease the risk of embarrassment.

### **Question 3**

**What age groups, or at which stages of life should people educate themselves?**

Lynda:

- 1) Young girls who are participating in exercise (10-20 year olds).
- 2) Pregnant, postnatal or menopausal women.
- 3) Anyone who has pelvic floor dysfunction.
- 4) Anyone who has any risk factors for pelvic floor dysfunction.

Vicki:

- Pelvic floor dysfunction is not biased as to whom it may affect. Both genders are at risk.
- Most ages and stages of life should look at education and even re-education.
- Anyone who has pelvic floor dysfunction or are at risk for having pelvic floor dysfunction. For those who are not sure they can see a pelvic floor health/women's health physiotherapist, their Lead Maternity Caregiver or their health provider. There are also assessment forms that NZ Continence NZ provide to professionals as a tool to use to assess both men and women.
- Mostly, I think young women should be educated around the age of menstruation especially those who are athletic/competing in athletic programmes, such as trampolining. The constant pressure and loading of the pelvic floor from such heights can prove to be rather damaging to the pelvic floor. The cost of this is usually at an emotional and social level with some degree of incontinence.
- Women who are planning a pregnancy or are pregnant
- Women who are post pregnancy whether they have had vaginal deliveries or caesarean sections.
- Women who have had multiple births.
- Women who are going through any stage of menopause due to changes in their hormones
- Women who are preparing themselves for pelvic surgery, including hysterectomies so that they have better outcomes and reduce the risk of having to have further related surgery.
- Those who do high impact exercise
- People who lift heavy objects on a daily basis

- Those who are overweight
- Those who are in jobs who stand all day
- Those who may have bowel issues such as constipation or strain
- Those who have a condition that causes them to cough deeply and hard – such as asthmatic, smokers, chronic obstructive airways disease, influenza...
- Men who are preparing to have pelvic surgery such as prostate surgery and those who are post-surgical too.
- Basically, anyone who has one or more of these should be educated on the importance of looking after their pelvic floor health.

**Question 4:**

**Why are you lending your expertise and support to this campaign (for further self-education regarding the pelvic floor)?**

Lynda:

I am very passionate about women exercising appropriately for their life stage. It would be great to decrease the incidence of exercise induced pelvic floor weakness or dysfunction becoming worse from exercising inappropriately.

Vicki:

I am lending my expertise and support to this campaign as I am incredibly passionate about women's health, pelvic floor health and primary health care. I firmly believe in prevention rather than "the ambulance at the bottom of the hill" concept.

I believe all people should be empowered to have a good quality life! I want to raise awareness of exercise induced pelvic floor dysfunction and decrease the statistics within

our communities.

I love delivering presentations to communities, workplaces and Personal Trainers to educate on pelvic floor issues. I run seminars in Christchurch and I run Pelvic Floor Matters® seminars on a regular basis in Christchurch and recently, nationally. This has certainly brought about an awareness of the need to look after one's pelvic floor health in an exercise environment.

Not only am I a REPs Registered Personal Trainer and a Registered Nurse, I am a mother and a wife and someone who has experienced pelvic floor issues first hand with all the issues that one could have associations with!

I mainly train women to learn how to exercise doing exercises that are safe for their pelvic floor so that they are not putting their pelvic floor at risk or leaking. This helps women to be confident to exercise which of course helps with so many other aspects of life like decreasing health risks such as heart disease and diabetes and of course puts that gorgeous glow on their faces that proves a quality life!

***Continence NZ in conjunction with Exercise NZ and REPS (Register of Health Professionals) is launching a 'Pelvic Floor Focus' half day workshop which will be available nationwide, starting with Christchurch on September 2nd. REPS has awarded the programme 5 CPD points on completion of the programme or other Continence NZ approved programmes such as that run by Vicki. Trainers will be classed as 'Pelvic Floor Safe' and promoted to the public as such.***