

INNER CIRCLE Insights

URINARY INCONTINENCE

Urinary Incontinence (UI) is an exceedingly common disorder that affects many people ranging from children to adults. UI occurs due to problems with the muscles and nerves that help to hold or release urine from the bladder. It primarily affects women, but both women and men can be incontinent from neurological injury, pelvic floor weakness, childbirth, urethral sphincter weakness, low estrogen levels, scar tissue, obesity, episiotomy, hysterectomy, prolapsed and enlarged prostate in men, to name a few. Older women experience UI more often than their younger counterparts but incontinence is not inevitable with age. No single treatment works for everyone but many women can find help without surgery.

UI generally falls into four difference categories; stress, urge, overflow or mixed incontinence. Stress incontinence happens when there is dysfunction of the pelvic floor muscles. They are incapable of counteracting the increase in intra-abdominal pressure that can occur with exercise, sneezing or coughing which puts pressure on the bladder and leads to leakage of urine in small or large amounts. Urge incontinence is the sudden and overwhelming urge to urinate with involuntary contraction of the bladder. It may be caused by irritation of the bladder or anything that may cause a disruption in the autonomic nervous system that controls the bladder. Overflow incontinence occurs because the bladder is unable to completely empty, leading to overflow which leaks out involuntarily. It can also occur when one is unable to sense that the bladder is full. This type of incontinence is more common in men than women. In some patients, more than one of these forms of incontinence are involved which is considered mixed incontinence. Regardless of the type of UI, all disorders lead to a tremendous amount of physical discomfort and emotional stress for the patient.

UI can be improved in most cases; however, few patients with incontinence discuss the condition with their healthcare provider. This is compounded by the belief that there is no treatment for UI other than surgeries or medication. Thankfully, the medical community has begun to realize the effectiveness of Physical Therapy in treating the symptoms of UI. A study in March of 2008 in *Annals of Internal Medicine* reported that physical therapy can help patients manage, if not alleviate, the symptoms of UI. This significant study shows the importance of Physical Therapy in the treatment of UI.

Evaluation at Inner Circle begins with a detailed medical and gynecological history, bladder habits and perceived severity of the symptoms on the patient's quality of life. Further evaluation will assess muscle strength of the external musculature (abdominals, adductors, hip rotators), internal pelvic musculature, fascia restrictions, scar integrity, range of motion, sacroiliac mobility and pelvic symmetry. Once the examination is completed, the patient and their healthcare team will be given an explanation of the perceived problems, the prescribed treatment and the treatment goals. Treatment of UI is highly effective and often involves exercises, biofeedback, relaxation techniques, habit training and manual therapy. The exercise portion focuses on muscle symmetry, strengthening and endurance to control urination. Relaxation techniques and biofeedback provide increase awareness and control of the pelvic musculature as patients learn to resist the urge to urinate frequently. Habit training includes setting a schedule with the therapist, learning certain foods to avoid and nutritional deficiencies that may be contributing to the problem. Manual therapy consists of multiple techniques unique to Inner Circle including Myofascial Release, acupressure, joint mobilization, muscle energy, and Lower Nerve Tension techniques. These techniques will be utilized to decrease the restrictions within the pelvic musculature and organs (i.e. bladder), allowing freedom from compression and the resultant dysfunction. Internal pelvic floor work can be integrated, if needed, by a highly trained female therapist. Furthermore treatment of the hips, legs and sacrum will provide more global changes in pain, relaxation, postural awareness, body symmetry and the gains in muscle strength required for long-term health and well-being.

There are a multitude of case studies that reflect the effectiveness of Physical Therapy for patients suffering from UI and other disorders related to pelvic floor dysfunction. One case involves a 37 year-old female with no history of trauma, an unremarkable vaginal birth, no prior surgeries, two bulging discs at L4-L5 and L5-S1, frequent urinary tract infections and an increasing frequency in urination. These symptoms of frequency were gradually increasing over the previous six months and continually provided the stress of the "am I going to make it?" Following her evaluation, it was determined that restrictions were noted in her psoas region, resulting in increased compression between her right iliac crest and lower ribcage. Subjective pain complaints were consistent throughout the external hip musculature and sacral region. Range of motion discrepancies were noted with hip extension and internal rotation and concurrent weakness throughout the muscles of her back, pelvic floor and hips. Treatment began with manual techniques performed by an advanced manual practitioner throughout the pelvis, hips and sacral region. Changes were reported by the patient after two session, as her pain levels and frequency of urination had both decreased. After following through with education, relaxation techniques, habit training and an individualized strengthening program, the patients pain had resolved, her range of motion had increased and normal bladder control was regained. This is but an example of many people that have benefited from the unique and specialized approach offered by Inner Circle.

Many women either suffer in silence or turn to drugs, surgeries or appliances when a conservative approach can help. Inner Circle provides effective and comprehensive treatment for many women's issues include incontinence. If you are suffering from this or other related conditions (i.e. pelvic pain, vulvodynia, coccygodynia, interstitial cystitis, pain with intercourse or infertility), Inner Circle can help with your treatment protocol. I hope this was helpful in improving your understanding of the services and the different approach we provide, especially for women. I am always available for questions or demonstrations of the treatment techniques. As always, thank you for your time and support.

Professionally yours,
Timothy M. Alloway, MSPT