

Getting Help with Pelvic Floor Dysfunction after childbirth

Personal Stories

Maud's story

"I first noticed that I was leaking small amount of urine with movement and lifting things when I was about thirty weeks pregnant with Jacob, my second child. It was just happening occasionally to begin with, but it began to happen more and more frequently. I had to start wearing a pad all the time. I felt dirty and really embarrassed. I assumed that this was just part of having children and that it was probably quite normal. But after I had given birth the problem got worse. I was leaking almost all the time and I started having to rush to the loo and would always try to keep my bladder empty. I even started restricting what I was drinking to try and help with this, but the problem kept getting worse. My midwife reminded me to complete my ePAQ questionnaire when she saw me at one of the postnatal visits. I didn't mention my bladder problems to her because I was so embarrassed and also because I thought it was probably just something I would have to put up with. I didn't even really talk to my partner about it. Filling in my ePAQ Pelvic Floor questionnaire was really helpful. It asked me questions about all my symptoms and I could answer these in the quiet and privacy of my home when Jacob was down for a nap. I was contacted a short time later by the pelvic health team who offered me physiotherapy sessions. I was a bit sceptical about how helpful this could be for me, but I went along. Helen, the physiotherapist I saw was so helpful. She went through lots of tips for my bladder health, in terms of what I drink and when. She showed me how to contract my pelvic floor which it turns out was very weak. She gave me a course of exercises to do. It was a bit hard to remember to do the exercises regularly whilst looking after Jacob and life was very busy, but once I got into the swing of things, I started to notice some improvements. Had follow up with Helen and continued to improve. Now I don't have any incontinence and my overactive bladder problems have resolved. I still do my exercises. Having the opportunity to tell someone your symptoms in a non-scary way, using the online questionnaire, which allowed me to get help was fantastic and I will always be grateful for the team's help."

Svetlana's story

"My little girl Natalia was born really quickly. I had to have quite a lot of stiches afterwards and was really sore. I spent the first few days in bed and didn't really notice anything was up. Once I was up and about I started to become aware that I was having problems with my bowels. I couldn't control things when I needed to pass wind, and this was really embarrassing. If I needed to go for a poo I also had to really rush and couldn't wait. This made it really difficult for me to leave the house. I then had an accident with my bowels. It happened without warning. It was so embarrassing, I had to throw my underwear away. I didn't know what to do or how to ask for help. My GP surgery is very difficult to get an appointment at. I was really embarrassed by what had happened and tried my best to be constipated, to try and stop it from happening again. My partner was really supportive, but I felt really unattractive and miserable. I stopped going out altogether and didn't take Natalia to any baby groups. At about four months after the delivery I had an email asking me to complete the ePAQ-Pelvic Floor questionnaire to help me identify any pelvic floor problems I had developed after giving birth to Natalia. I filled this in and answered all the questions. It was simple as they were all multiple choice. To my surprise there were specific questions about the bowel troubles I had been

experiencing. I was contacted by the pelvic health team who offered me physiotherapy. I had six sessions with Clair, one of the physiotherapists who helped me with exercises to strengthen my pelvic floor, which was very weak. She was also able to identify some possible issues with the muscles around my bottom. Clair referred me directly to the colorectal team. They were great and did some tests which showed that I had some weakness in the muscles which I use to control my bowels. I had a specialised course of physiotherapy to focus on that specific problem and it made it much better. I now have almost no bowel problems at all and I regularly do exercises to maintain my pelvic floor strength. I also know where I can find help in the future if I have more problems with this.”

Jenny's story

“Our little boy Nathaniel was born at 34 weeks. There were some problems with my labour, which was very long and Nathaniel was born very unwell. Devastatingly for us, he died four days later. My husband and I were absolutely broken by this. We felt numb and the next few weeks and months just seemed to blur together in one long tunnel of grief. I'd had a small tear when Nathaniel was born which had been stitched and was a bit sore for a few weeks afterwards. I had taken some painkillers and got very constipated with these. I'd had lots of difficulty going for a poo and had to strain a lot. I then noticed that I had a heavy sensation in my vagina all the time, worse at the end of the day and when I'd been standing. I hadn't been out much for the first few weeks and months, but I was trying to motivate myself to go out for walks and into town to try and have some normality. I felt like I had a lump in my vagina when I was walking sometimes. Eventually, I looked at my vagina with a mirror to see if I could see anything to this feeling. That was the first time I had ever looked properly at myself. I could see a bulge coming out of the vagina. I felt so low. I had lost my son and now I had this horrible problem with my vagina. I felt ugly and unattractive. I was also really embarrassed. Eventually, with my husband's encouragement I did see a GP. They referred me to a urogynaecology doctor who explained that I had a small prolapse of the back wall of my vagina. He also explained that my pelvic floor muscles were very weak and that it was likely that many of my symptoms would improve with physiotherapy. He referred me to physiotherapy, but also directed me to the NHS Squeezy App. This was a huge help to me whilst I waited to see a physiotherapist. When I saw Madeleine the physiotherapist, she was able to join the dots for me and build on what I had learned and done with the Squeezy App. After several months of exercises and some more sessions with Madeleine my symptoms began to disappear and are now gone. This has helped me to regain my confidence, and my husband and I are planning to try for another baby soon. Madeleine was able to give me lots of advice about what to do in my next pregnancy and also how to get help with the online questionnaire if I needed it again. It is so important that we don't forget that women with a stillborn baby or a baby who dies can still be affected by pelvic floor problems and need help too.”