



Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust



Cornwall Partnership
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Vaginal and ano-rectal examination during physiotherapy



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Why do I need this?

You are attending physiotherapy because you may have a problem with your bladder, bowels or pelvic floor muscles. To advise the most appropriate course of treatment, your physiotherapist needs to assess the strength and function of your pelvic floor muscles. This is done through an internal examination.

We know that around 40% of patients who carry out pelvic floor exercises, do so incorrectly. The examination will enable your physiotherapist to tell you if you are doing your exercises properly and to assess what treatment may be best for your symptoms.

What will it involve?

Your physiotherapist will ask you to undress and remove your underwear in private and then lie on the treatment bed. You will have a cover over your pelvic area to maintain your dignity. They will look at your perineal area to assess the condition of the skin and ask you to contract your pelvic floor muscles. They will touch the outside skin to check the skin sensation. Wearing a pair of gloves they will then insert one or two fingers into the vagina (or one finger into the back passage) so they can assess your muscles. They may ask you to do a number of things during the examination including coughing, bearing down, contracting (squeezing) or relaxing your muscles. This is to assess reflexes, muscle tone, length, strength and endurance, scar mobility and functional activity of the pelvic floor region. We do not use a speculum during vaginal examination.

How long will the examination take?

Normally an examination will take between 5-10 minutes.

What are the benefits?

Your physiotherapist will be able to tell you if you are correctly contracting and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles. This will help with your exercise programme.

The examination will enable the physiotherapist to suggest the best course of treatment based on what they find. This may include internal or external techniques to help relax and stretch the muscles when they are tight, simple equipment which may help you to see if your muscles are working or to strengthen weak muscles.

Any suggested treatment will be fully discussed with you, any risks and benefits of the treatment explained and a therapeutic plan agreed.

Will I have any pain or discomfort?

You may find the examination a little uncomfortable, but you should not experience any pain. If you do experience pain or are unhappy in any way, you may stop the examination at any point.

Are there any risks?

There are no documented serious or frequently occurring risks linked to intimate examinations. Rarely occurring short term risks/side effects are usually temporary and include:

- pain / discomfort / soreness
- infection eg urinary tract infection/thrush (an internal examination will not be performed if you are currently experiencing these symptoms). We do not usually examine during heavy menstruation.
- urinary / faecal leakage.

What if I do not want to be examined?

We can still give treatment, but it may be less specific. Sometimes we can assess the pelvic floor externally through your clothing; this is not as accurate but will give basic information to form a treatment plan.

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes – if you would feel more comfortable bring a friend or relative with you to the appointment. Your supporter will usually be seated outside the examination area.

Can we arrange for a chaperone to be present?

Yes – your physiotherapist can arrange for a chaperone to be present during your examination; we would need advanced notice to do this. The chaperone will be seated outside the examination area.

Any questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about this or any part of your treatment please talk to your physiotherapist.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

