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Newsletter Summer 2009



abc NEWS

20/20

Friday, August 7, 2009
at 10 P.M. EST

Segment on Female Sexual Dysfunction & Physical Therapy
Featuring Amy Stein, MPT

PART 2

Please See Part 1 in
Spring 2009 Issue

Female Sexual Dysfunction & Physical Therapy By Stephanie Lutz, DPT & Amy Stein, MPT

Written for the Women's Sexual Health Foundation

How can physical therapy help treat FSD?

Female sexual dysfunction requires a proper diagnosis, appropriate care and follow-up. As mentioned above, female sexual dysfunction involves a myriad of physical and mental factors. Psychological stress, diet, and physical conditions should all be considered and treated by the appropriate healthcare provider when creating a comprehensive treatment plan for female sexual dysfunction. The good news regarding female sexual dysfunction is that natural treatment options exist to help alleviate sexual problems. After addressing any underlying medical conditions (hormone levels, infections, etc.), physical therapy can be prescribed. Physical therapists skilled in pelvic floor function can evaluate and design a treatment program to address the musculoskeletal causes of FSD. For decreased libido and sexual response without pelvic pain, physical therapists can use massage and pelvic floor strengthening (sometimes known as kegel exercises) to increase blood flow and strengthen weak muscles. Biofeedback can assist in strengthening the pelvic floor muscles, or vaginal weights can be used. However, neither of these is required to do these exercises.



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INTERNATIONAL PELVIC PAIN SOCIETY
2009 ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING

October 2009

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Hyatt Regency Phoenix, Arizona

Female Sexual Dysfunction and Physical Therapy By Stephanie Lutz, DPT & Amy Stein, MPT

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When pelvic pain is a factor in sexual dysfunction, pelvic floor muscles and connective tissues often exhibit hypersensitivity, tenderness, and spasm. Internal and external massage will reduce tender points and restrictions in connective tissue as well as relax and lengthen the pelvic floor muscles. Dilators may be issued, as part of the at home program, to assist in normalizing the tone of the muscles and to help with desensitization of hypersensitive tissues. Physical therapists can also use relaxation techniques and biofeedback to teach the muscles not to tense. Additionally, stretching the muscles of the hips, trunk and pelvic floor can assist in alleviating pelvic pain. Once pelvic pain symptoms have been eliminated, a physical therapist may carefully progress specific exercises to strengthen any weakness found in the core and pelvic floor, allowing for more stability. Behavioral training techniques are incorporated in the home program to help with relaxing the pelvic floor muscles throughout the day and especially during sexual activity. If the individual has had changes in bladder and bowel function, she may be given exercises and techniques to help return to normal function. Research has shown a significant improvement through physical therapy treatment in up to 87% of women suffering from pelvic pain disorders, such as vulvodynia.

Conclusion

Though female sexual dysfunction may include multiple factors, careful diagnosis and proper treatment can alleviate the problem. Treatment needs to be multidisciplinary and all factors need to be addressed. Talk to a health care provider that specializes in FSD if you are concerned about a persistent sexual difficulty. Physical therapy has proven to be an effective form of treatment for the musculoskeletal components of Female Sexual Dysfunction.

Acupuncture for Chronic Pain By Paula Haberman, PT, L.Ac

The U.S. Air Force is now running a pilot program training active-duty physicians in a style of acupuncture that will be incorporated into the practice of military medicine both in the clinic and in the battlefield.

Battlefield Acupuncture is an auricular (ear) acupuncture treatment that was developed by Dr. Richard Niemtzow, a full time acupuncture physician in the U.S. Air Force. Dr. Niemtzow discovered this technique while researching pain relieving mechanisms that would enable a rapid return to combat. Acupuncture proved more effective than some medications due to the lethargic produced by narcotics. Soldiers under the influence of these medications could have altered reaction time and judgment and this could cancel a critical mission.

The procedure for battlefield acupuncture consists of placing 5 semi-permanent needles at specific points in each ear that stimulate the pain modulating centers of the brain. Cessation of pain can be achieved in minutes. The needles are retained in the ears until they fall out themselves (usually 2 to 4 days) or can be removed at any time if discomfort develops. Pain relief can last hours to days depending upon the severity and chronicity of the pathology.



Since the acupuncture points chosen target the pain processing centers of the central nervous system, this treatment that can be effective for chronic pain anywhere in the body. This treatment is able to provide very quick pain relief for both simple and complex problems. In the military, battlefield acupuncture effectively alleviates pain from conditions like fractured ribs and back pain, and has also allowed the decreased use of narcotics for complex injuries. Recently, this technique has become a popular adjunct in pain management for cancer patients and has also been an effective treatment for resolving most migraine headaches.

This technique would be a wonderful adjunct to any PT treatment regime for pelvic floor dysfunction and pelvic pain. The needles can be inserted prior to a therapy session to help alleviate the discomfort during and after the treatment. The needles can be retained for a few days after treatment to continue to decrease the sensation of pain. Pain anywhere in the body creates a sensory memory in the brain and central nervous system. The body habituates to an experience of pain. Thus the benefits are twofold: alleviating pain and re-patterning the nervous system. For more information regarding trying this protocol at Beyond Basics Physical Therapy, contact Paula Haberman, PT., L. Ac. Tel: 646-465-1637
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