

The Pelvic Floor

Anatomy and Function of the Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor is a flat muscle group about the size of a hand that closes pelvis at the bottom. Its shape and function are almost identical in men and women, with the exception of the vaginal opening. The pelvic floor is connected to the coccyx, the hip joints, and the sacroiliac joints. Together with the abdominal and back muscles, it forms a functional unit that stabilizes the torso and is closely related to breathing.

Together with connective tissue structures, the pelvic floor stabilizes the pelvic organs: the bladder, the bowel, and the uterus. It is also responsible for controlling bowel movements and urination. Both the bladder and the bowel have an external sphincter muscle. This can be controlled voluntarily, actively closing when we feel the urge to go or releasing when we are on the toilet. The pelvic floor also plays an important role in sexuality and contributes significantly to maintaining and controlling arousal.

In everyday life, the pelvic floor must be both enduring and fast: for example, long-lasting automatic stabilization during a hike is just as important as quick closure when sneezing.

Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

Pelvic floor dysfunction can lead to prolapse symptoms, loss of urine or stool, and bladder or bowel emptying problems. If the tension in the pelvic floor is too high, it can cause pain in the genital area, during sexual activity, or when emptying the bowels. It can also cause a constant urge to urinate or pain in the entire pelvic region.

Risk factors for pelvic floor dysfunction include general physical weakness, connective tissue weakness, pregnancy and childbirth, surgery or radiation in the pelvic area, neurological or congenital diseases, chronic cough, high physical stress (sports, obesity), and age.

Pelvic Floor Physiotherapy

Pelvic floor physiotherapists can determine whether the pelvic floor muscles have too much or too little tension, endurance, and strength through questioning and examination. The goal is to normalize muscle tension and build strength and endurance: sufficient support in everyday life and sufficient relaxation, e.g., on the toilet. Behavioral strategies are taught to normalize bladder or bowel function and, depending on the individual's needs, electrostimulation or aids are used.

