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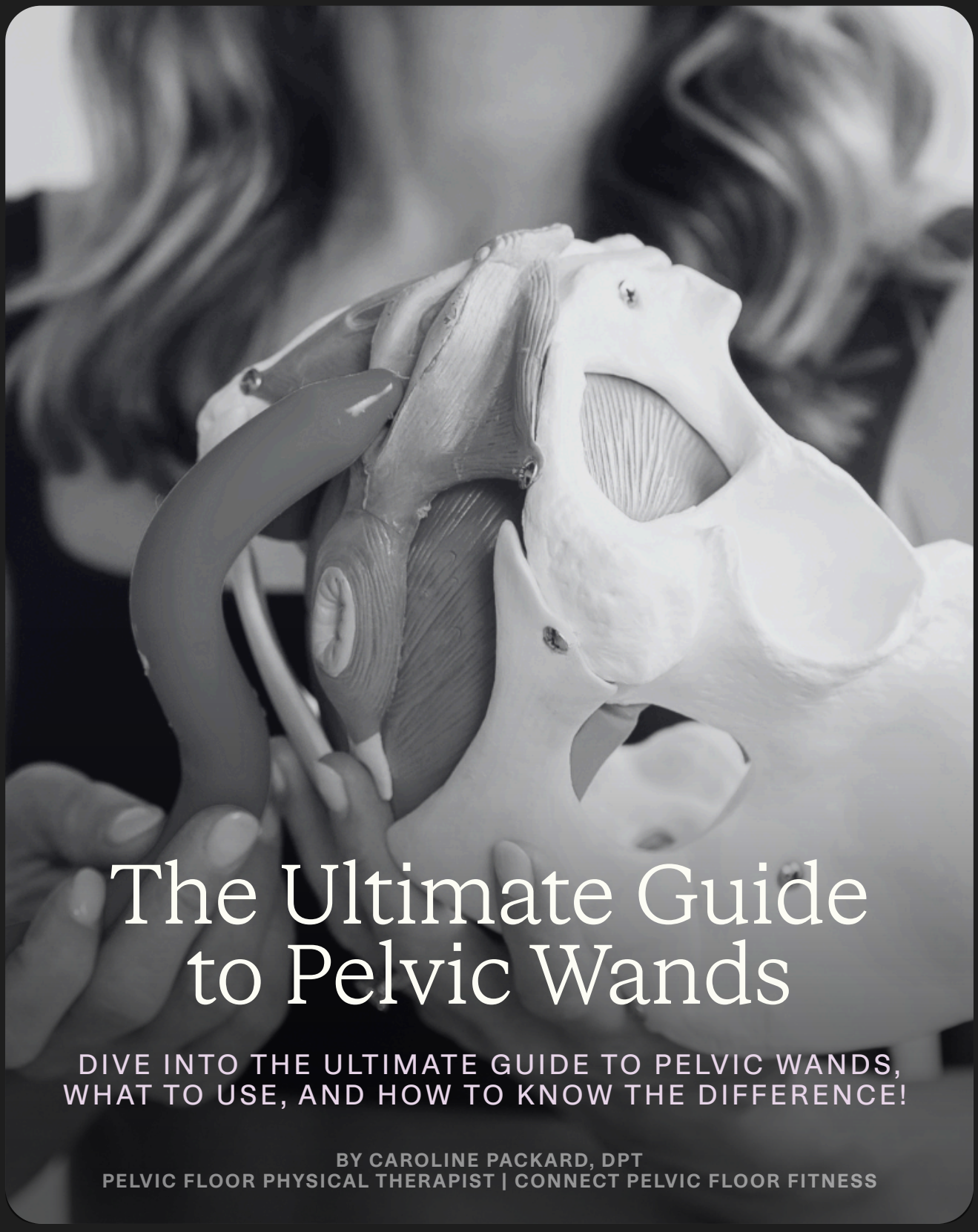

The Ultimate Guide to Pelvic Wands

DIVE INTO THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PELVIC WANDS, WHAT TO USE, AND HOW TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!

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MEET THE EXPERT

Hi, I'm Caroline.



I'm Caroline Packard, a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist d**edicated to helping YOU improve your pelvic floor dysfunction** so you can get back to doing the things you **LOVE**.

As a mom of 3, I experienced pelvic floor issues that led me down the path of doctors' visits and my own pelvic floor physical therapy. As both a patient and professional, when I learned and put into practice some of the simple concepts related to improving the pelvic floor, I was stunned at the lack of mainstream availability in education and information on this topic. When put into practice these teachings can make a major impact on quality of life- BUT if only more women knew about it!

Living that experience, solving my own dysfunction and helping others in the clinic has fueled a passion to spread that message even further. I started my Instagram account to bring awareness to issues of pelvic floor dysfunction to teach women that we can exert control over those 'embarrassing things' like leaking, pelvic organ prolapse, pain with intercourse, a belly "pooch" and more. And also to let you know, that you're not alone in your struggles.

I am so grateful for the community I've created on Instagram and love to share videos, but short clips can only take you so far. So I wanted to create a way to compile the information for you in an easy to understand manner with these resources.

LISTEN CLOSELY

Lets start with the elephant in the room.

Drawing from my experience as a physical therapist specializing in pelvic floor therapy, I am thoroughly familiar with the potential thoughts and reactions that emerge when I recommend utilizing a pelvic wand for pelvic dysfunction. This typically triggers a sense of shame and embarrassment and is mostly viewed as unconventional. In the majority of cases, my patients exhibited significant reluctance & hesitation to the idea of using a pelvic wand.

The truth is...

The truth is the pelvic floor is a bowl of muscles that are INTERNAL to your body-akin to any other muscles in your body. These muscles, like those you readily massage for relief when tight, form a vital component of your overall muscular system. While external massage has its limits, the most effective method for mobilizing and massaging our pelvic floor muscles is through internal access. The pelvic wand is a tool that helps make this self massage ergonomically possible.

The question then becomes, should I be using a pelvic wand?

The answer: A lot of women could benefit from using a pelvic wand. Here are some instances where using a pelvic wand would be beneficial.

Reasons to Use a Pelvic Wand

Pelvic floor tension: Internal and external

Painful penetration: Initial penetration and deep penetration pain *(for example: pain with intercourse)*

Perineal scar tissue: For example if you had a tear during delivery or episiotomy then you would have a scar whether it was cut like an episiotomy or a spontaneous tear; scar tissue can restrict the ability of the muscles and tissues to work as well and can create pain. Massaging this area contributes to reducing any restrictions and creating more mobile tissue, which then can decrease pain in that area.

Perineal massage prior to delivery

Trigger Points and Tender Points: Pelvic floor dysfunction can be a result of a pelvic floor that is overworked due to weakness in other surrounding muscles like hips and glutes. This happens when the smaller pelvic floor muscles are repetitively doing the work of these larger muscles like the hips & glutes. Over time this scenario creates dysfunction and pain in our pelvic floor muscles even to the point of being painful to touch aka “trigger points or tender points.” While the ultimate goal is to create strength in those weak surrounding muscles (hips & glutes) so that the pelvic floor can relax, we can also help foster relaxation of those muscles to calm symptoms through self massage.

Let me say that again: While the ultimate goal is to create strength in those weak surrounding muscles (hips & glutes) so that the pelvic floor can relax, we can also help foster relaxation of those muscles to calm symptoms through self massage.

Difficult to reach areas that are commonly indicated in pelvic floor issues like the deep muscles near the tailbone and the deep hip rotators: These areas are difficult to reach with external massage and commonly indicated in pelvic floor issues that can show up as chronic tailbone pain and deep aching pain in the butt. Anatomically, those muscles are deep within the pelvic bowl and can only be accessed internally. If you cannot massage out that pain externally it is time to consider internal massage.

Lastly, to create Feedback: The pelvic wand can help you learn how to feel and identify where your pelvic floor muscles are - helps identify the front, middle, and back of your pelvic floor. If you have struggled to feel your pelvic floor muscles either relax and lengthen OR with contract, then this tool can also help you to foster better mind-body connection. We can't strengthen or lengthen muscles we can't feel and one of the best ways to re-create this connection is with touch which amplifies to your brain this mind-body feedback loop. You can use the wand to identify these areas and work on actively contracting the muscle it is in contact with. Once that connection is established you work on contracting without requiring the wand to direct your activation pattern.

Theories on Why The Pelvic Wand Works for the Above Issues

A Physical Massage Tool

The wand functions as a physical massage tool to release tension in a painful muscle. This is becoming a less likely theory as pain is more complex, rather we have to consider the next idea.

Emotional Factors

Emotional factors like stress and anxiety can influence and heighten pain response. Pain, memory and traumatic events can also increase this response.

The Nervous System

The nervous system's role in pain is complex. Peripheral (distant front the brain) nerve cells can become hypersensitive, where even mild stimuli can be perceived as more painful than they are. Our central nervous system can also become hypersensitive- imagine a highway for pain and a highway that has no pain. The more the pain highway is used, the more the body chooses that pathway, creating a cycle of worsening pain. If we can break that cycle, and teach the body to use the other highway, we can break through the pain cycle.

Best Explanation

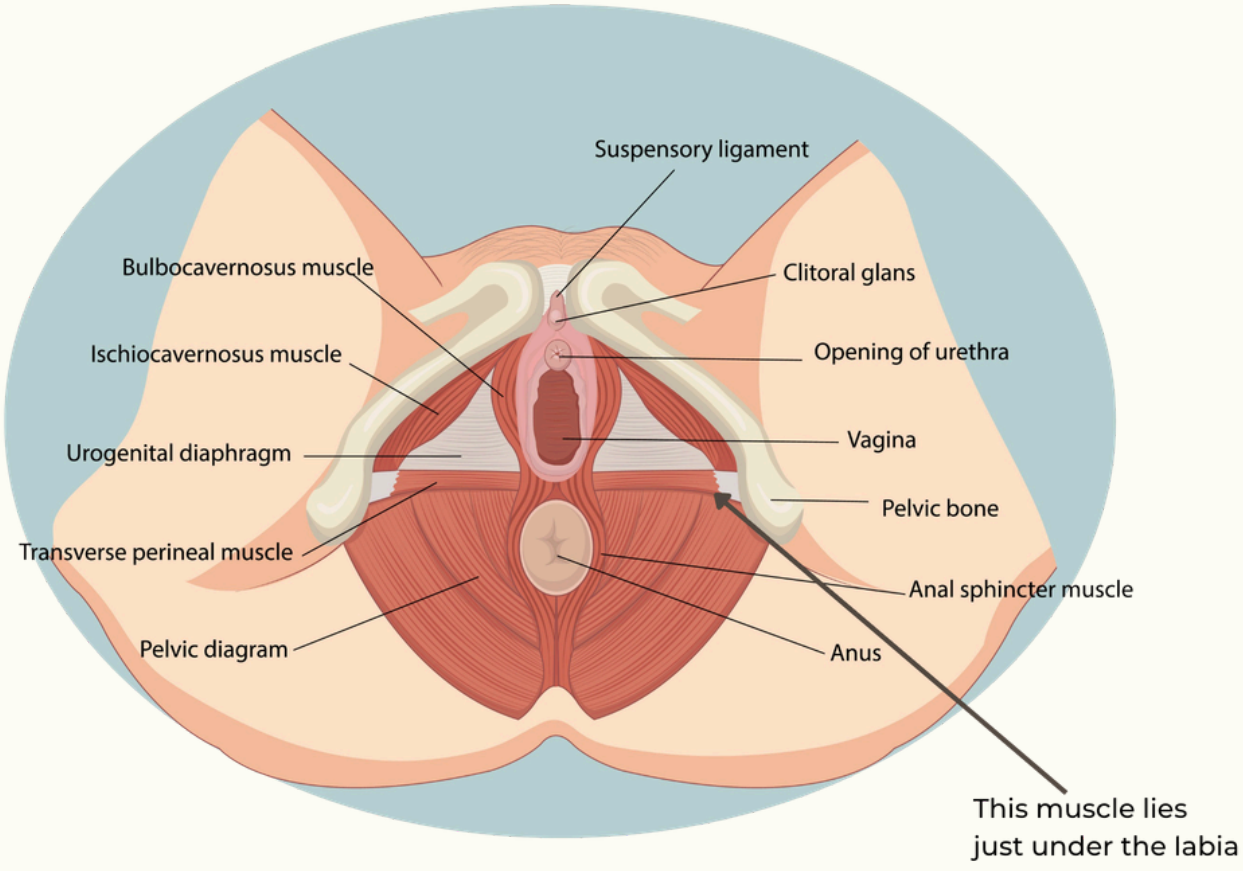
My best explanation is this: we use the wand physically to help foster better mind-body connection and teach our brain to perceive signals differently- when we use gentle touch with breath, we tap into our Parasympathetic Nervous System otherwise known as the "rest and digest" nervous system. Over time this helps to desensitize our nervous system response, resulting in decreased pain and improved function.

How to Know Where to Use The Wand

Examination & Self Assessement

When it comes to pelvic floor dysfunction or pain, I will always suggest it is best to be examined in-person by a pelvic floor physical therapist who can assess your muscles and guide you to what is your best personalized treatment plan.

However, I also acknowledge barriers to access to physical therapists trained for the pelvic floor and believe individuals can learn on their own. The outline below will help you self assess and guide you through learning where to use the wand.



General Guidelines Before Use

Must Understand Diaphragm Breathing first: The goal with the pelvic wand is to decrease tenderness and relax the pelvic floor muscles. The wand does not necessarily massage out the tender points rather it lets us have a conversation with the nervous system about how to relax to release them. We do this through deep breathing which directly activates our “calm down” nervous system. If we can interrupt the pain loop by consciously breathing and choosing relaxation we can start to change the conversation of pain perception in the body.

Make sure belly is relaxed, no tension.

Choose a position that does not increase tension: if on your back with legs butterflied, need to support with pillows otherwise the inner thighs can be too much on stretch or too active and won’t let the pelvic floor relax OR sidelying is a great option as well (see photos below).

Make sure you are feeling calm and relaxed, not nervous about using the wand. Make sure you are not in a situation that you are feeling anxious or rushed (i.e. someone from your family will walk in)

If the above guidelines are not followed this will be a self-defeating process.

Choosing a Position



Semi Reclined Butterfly Position

Make sure to place 1-2 pillows under each knee to support the legs. If your inner thighs are tight in this position they can create tension in the pelvic floor and make it difficult to relax.

Sidelying with Knees Together

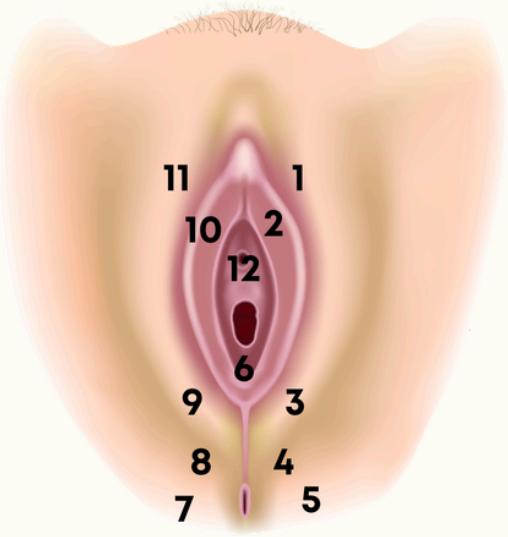
Enter vagina and focus mobilization on the side of the pelvis that is the bottom leg. Great position to minimize tension from the inner thighs on the pelvic floor and to access the deep hip rotators. Then flip to the other side.



How to Use Your Pelvic Wand For Pelvic Dysfunction

How to Get Started

Begin in a semi-reclined position and knees butterflied open with support of pillows under each knee.



Follow the image guide to see where to gently place the wand to understand what areas may be tender, painful, or the tissues don't move well beginning externally . Once you identify tender points, that is where you will direct self massage treatment.

Touch the wand to the outside of your vagina at the perineum (labeled as #1), with gentle pressure, as if you were going to touch a tomato and not bruise it.

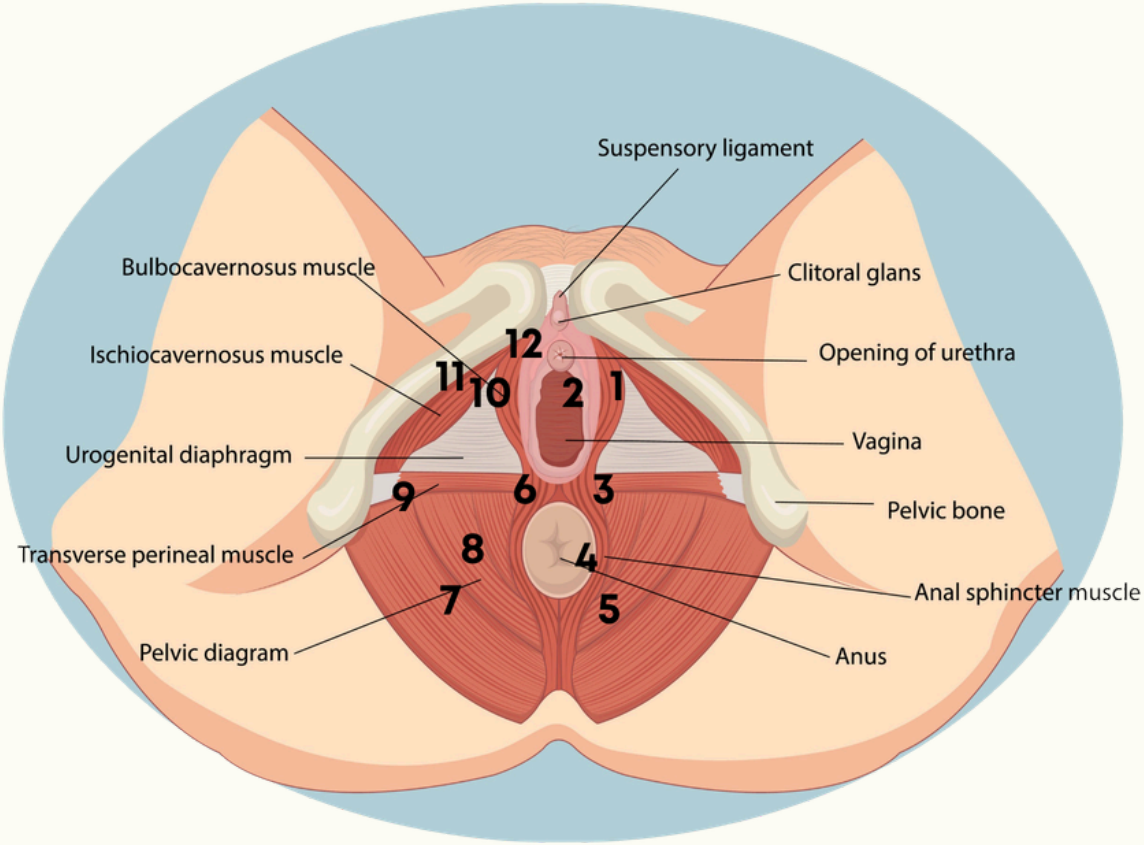
Pause and assess: What do you feel? If it's painful or uncomfortable, stop and notice if you tensed up in your body, clenching your teeth, clenching your butt? Take a deep breath into the diaphragm, let the belly relax and pelvic floor relax. Did this change the sensation of the pain?

Continue to follow the outline pelvic clock, taking the time to assess each time what you feel at each location and take note of these areas, this is where you will return to work on with the wand.

Before Internal Self-Assessment

After external assessment, with a well lubricated wand, move to the vaginal opening. With just the tip of the wand in the vaginal opening, gently apply pressure between 1o'clock & 3 o'clock. Stop and assess how that felt, use breathing to calm down any discomfort. If pain decreases with breathing, hold pressure and add a gentle pull to open the vaginal canal in that position for 30 seconds then release.

Then apply gentle pressure between 3 o'clock and 5 o'clock, between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock, and between 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock. Avoid 12 o'clock (directly up at urethra) and 6 o'clock (directly down on rectum) and continue to move along the clock as outlined in the photo following the same assessment questions.



Internal Pelvic Floor Assessment

Internal Assessment

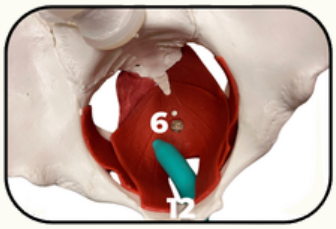
With a well lubricated wand, slowly insert the wand ½ inch into the vaginal canal. Stop and assess response. Then apply gentle stretch up, down, and to both sides. Assess response.

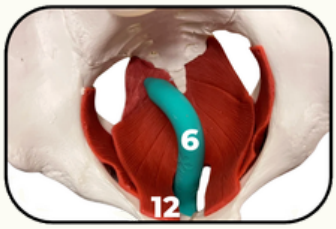
Internal pelvic floor assessment

Using the same guidelines of pressure, you will methodically move the wand into the vagina with the tip pointing downward toward the bowl of muscles. You will assess all the muscles along each side before moving to the next.

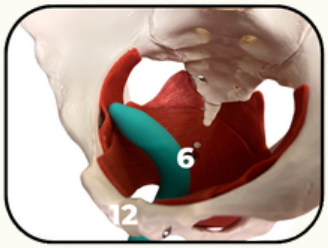
Avoid 12 o'clock (the tailbone) and 6 o'clock (the rectum)

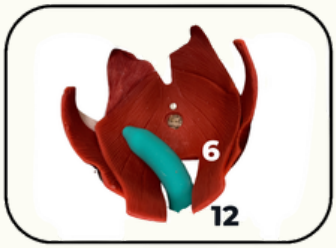
These are avoided because it would be uncomfortable and there is no muscle/no reason why you would specifically poke a wand at them.





For example the tailbone will always be tender and sensitive and you wouldn't push down on it, but you would massage the muscles along side it.





Pelvic Wand for FeedBack Use

The wand can help you learn how to feel and identify where your pelvic floor muscles are - helps identify the front, middle, and back of your pelvic floor if we divided that numbered graphic in half The muscles run from the front to the back so finding the whole length is important and identifying the whole scope of it.

Use the wand to identify where your muscles are in the bowl - what do they feel like? Difficult to feel, as if numb? Tender? Can you relax around the wand? Can you contract in the area of the wand? These are all questions that will help with your mind-body connection.

Self Mobilization

Use information gained from self assessment to guide your ongoing effort for mobilization. Areas that felt tender, painful, or tight and not moving well will have focused use of wand.



How to Perineal Massage

Gently massaging the perineum, the skin between the vagina and anus, beginning around 34 weeks of pregnancy up until delivery helps to stretch and soften the tissue making it less likely to tear during delivery. Because of the size of a pregnant belly it can be tricky to reach that area with your hand, so the wand is a great extension of your thumb to do self massage.

With a lubricated wand, insert ½ inch or less into the vaginal opening.

Apply a gentle stretch within the canal along the pelvic clock.

Use diaphragmatic breathing to promote relaxation and stretch.

Set Yourself Up for Success

Adequate Amount of Lubrication

I always recommend water based lubricant as it maintains the pH of the vagina. Water based lubricant requires re-application but does not leave lingering goop.

Set a Timer



5 min max in the beginning - setting an end timer makes sure that we can create success for ourselves. If we have a never ending time frame we will feel like we haven't accomplished what we should have OR we will be doing self massage for TOO long and be sore. As you begin to understand your body and tolerance more you can increase the time as able.

Time Progression When ready

It is important to start at 5 minutes but the goal is to eventually progress. Slowly increase over time to a maximum of 15 minutes. There is no real formula, listen to your body and add a minute here and there when you feel like you can progress. When the timer stops, no matter what the outcome of that session was, you need to stop. This ensures that you don't go over your physical limits AND that your success is not a result of how it felt but that you spent the time necessary to begin to make improvement.

On a scale of 1-10, 5 is the maximum amount of discomfort you should feel, no tingling or numbness.

The entire goal of using the wand is to RELAX and RELEASE the pelvic floor muscles, which means we should not INCREASE our pain. This requires slow, methodical use, paired with diaphragm breathing. We are teaching our nervous system to LET GO and calm down through manual touch and conscious breath work to release tension. Therefore, we are not pushing with extreme pressure or massaging the muscle until it hurts. IF you get to 5/10 pain, you need to pause and see if you can breathe to release tension and reduce that intensity. If you cannot, you need to reduce your pressure or cease massage of that area until you are able to tolerate it.

Start at 3 days/week

If tolerating well and find wand greatly improves symptoms you can certainly perform with more frequency, as long as you abide by the rule that it is not making symptoms worse. With consistent use, you will "self treat" and "self assess" at the same time- i.e. are the areas less tender or no longer tender to touch than initially? As symptoms improve you won't need to direct your attention there. Eventually the goal is to learn how to use the wand for symptom management as needed. Sometimes this is after a time of illness or not doing mobility work. Some people learn to use it a few days before their period for those who struggle with menstrual pain and find wand use before that will decrease their period pain significantly.

Get Your Mind Right

It's only weird if you perceive what you're doing with the wrong intentions. Just like any other muscle in your body can benefit from touch to release and relax (i.e. put your hands on your shoulders to relax them and release the tension you hold onto) the same is happening with the pelvic wand. It just so happens that these muscles lie within the vagina and can only best be accessed this way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Different types of wands and what works best for you.

Basic

No additional bells or whistles, the wand provides improved ergonomics for self massage and is the most affordable model that still helps achieve all of the above goals.

Vibrating

Basic wand plus different speeds of vibration- vibration can help to improve circulation and reduce pain by flooding nerve receptors with vibration rather than pain signals, which overall can contribute to pelvic muscle relaxation. *Look for lubricants with similar qualities & ingredients as these suggestions.*

Temperature Therapy Wand

Original wand plus features to heated to warm with tap water or cooled in the freezer, both which can be soothing to painful muscles and improve comfort of self massage.

Caroline's Favorites

Pelvic Wand:
Intimate Rose - Vibration can help both decrease pain sensations OR help to wake up a muscle that we have difficulty feeling and is worth the extra investment.

Lubricants:
Coconu Water Based Lubricant Save 15% with Code CAROLINEP
Good Clean Love

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Here's to living without limitations,
Caroline



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