

Survey finds most Americans believe pain and urinary leakage is normal for women after having children

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Mom of two, Nicole Gerardi-Lukens, experienced bladder prolapse after having her second child. She sought treatment with Tessa Ladd, an occupational therapist at Orlando Health, who helped her strengthen her pelvic floor and breathe through motions in a way that supports the pelvic floor. Credit: Orlando Health

A new national survey by the Orlando Health Advanced Rehabilitation Institute finds most Americans believe it's normal for women to experience pain, pressure and incontinence after having children. But experts say these are actually signs of pelvic floor issues, and while they are extremely common, affecting about a third of women, they are not normal.

"When we say it's not normal, what we mean is it's not something you should have to live with. It's something you can rehabilitate and improve," said Tessa Ladd, OTR/L, an [occupational therapist](#) at Orlando Health who specializes in treating pelvic floor dysfunction.

"By strengthening and coordinating pelvic floor muscles and learning how to breathe and move in a way that supports the pelvic floor, these symptoms that so many women live with for years can be drastically improved."

The survey, conducted by Ipsos, found that 71% of Americans agree it's normal for women to have some urinary leakage after having kids, and more than half (51%) believe it's normal for women to experience pain during sex after they've recovered from [childbirth](#)—both telltale signs of pelvic floor damage.

The pelvic floor is the group of muscles and ligaments that act as a "hammock" to support the vagina, uterus, bladder and rectum. When they become damaged—most commonly brought on by pregnancy, childbirth or aging—they can cause incontinence, as well as pain and pressure that occurs when these organs slip from their normal position, known as prolapse.

"Childbirth puts a lot of trauma on the body, but just like with any other

injury, muscles and tissues should have the ability to recover and support the [internal organs](#)," Ladd said. "If that doesn't happen, we can step in and help. The muscles within the pelvic floor are skeletal muscles. They're something that we do have control over, just like our biceps or our calves, and we have the ability to strengthen, lengthen and relax them."

The survey also found that 71% of respondents believe women should start working out to strengthen their abs and pelvic floor as soon after childbirth as possible, something Ladd warns can be counterproductive, as women feel societal pressure to "bounce back" after having a baby.

"You can begin to do some [deep breathing](#) and learn correct body mechanics in that early postpartum phase, but it's also important to allow your body time to heal and not to do too much too fast," Ladd said.

But before women can get the medical help they need, they have to acknowledge the problem.

"If we have a problem with our knee, we could talk to anyone about it without shame, without feeling uncomfortable or weird about it," Ladd said.

"Everyone has [pelvic floor muscles](#), yet it's something many women shy away from talking about, even with medical providers. When we open up about the symptoms we're struggling with and understand that so many of us have this shared experience, we can help women live their lives free from [pain](#) and symptoms caused by these common and treatable issues."

Provided by Orlando Health

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