

# A proactive approach: physical therapy aids prostate cancer recovery starting before surgery

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Prostate cancer is as prevalent in men as breast cancer is in women with one in eight men receiving the diagnosis. While it can be a serious disease, according to the American Cancer Society, most men diagnosed with prostate cancer don't die from it. The organization estimates that more than three million men in the U.S. alone are living after being treated for prostate cancer.

That astounding number is exactly why there is case after case proving the benefits of a physical therapy regimen to support bladder and pelvic health after prostate surgery and to control leakage. What you may not realize, however, is that the best time to start your recovery from prostate cancer is before surgery.

"Research suggests four to six weeks of exercise before surgery is beneficial," says Dr. Mallory Hertz,

a physical therapist specializing in the treatment of pelvic health issues.

"The nerves that go to the pelvic floor lay over top of the prostate, so when the prostate is removed, those nerves will be impacted. The doctor tries to spare as many nerves as possible, but there will be leaking after surgery."

Dr. Hertz from FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Centers of Dakota Dunes says targeted exercises before the surgery happens is key because most men haven't been trained to move those muscles prior to physical therapy. In fact, many men don't realize they have a pelvic floor at all. That's not surprising, Dr. Hertz says, because the pelvic floor is meant to be something that works automatically. While women learn about pelvic floor early in life due to pregnancy and childbirth, for most men, the conversation

doesn't arise until much later in life, when prostate health comes into play.

"Actually, the pelvic floor is very similar in men and women, but it's just not talked about. You shouldn't have to think about your pelvic floor. It's just supposed to 'do its thing,'" Dr. Hertz adds.

The good news, she says, is that most men have strong pelvic floor muscles, even if they don't realize it. One of the reasons being that men haven't had those muscles stretched or injured prior to prostate surgery. That means when Dr. Hertz teaches her patients to contract and control those muscles routinely ahead of an operation, re-building strength and controlling leaks after surgery is successful, and they usually catch onto the exercises quite easily.

"The stronger the muscle is before surgery, the better it's going to recover after," says Dr. Hertz. "Just like we would strengthen hips before a hip surgery or around the knee before a knee surgery, the more muscle bulk you have, the less you're going to be impacted after. It also helps to really establish that brain-muscle connection before the injury (surgery) occurs."

That's not to say if you're already post-surgery there's no hope. Just like any muscle in your body can be rehabilitated over time, so, too, can your pelvic floor even if you've been experiencing leakage for years. There are exercise techniques and tools Dr. Hertz uses to help improve even complex cases.

Whether it's prostate cancer or another condition causing incontinence or pain, the team at FYZICAL is skilled at creating an individualized plan to assess and support your unique concerns. That starts with a holistic approach, including looking at habits that might lead to embarrassing bladder issues.

"Sometimes it's a behavioral issue we need to address," adds Dr. Hertz. "Maybe you're drinking too much coffee or not drinking enough water, that's impacting leaking. We want to make sure you have habits that are supportive to a healthy bladder, as well."

Along with helping you establish a healthy routine, the team at FYZICAL addresses core and ab

strength, pain, and bowel concerns post-surgery, all of which could be impacting leaking, as well. They also assess hip strength due to its high correlation with pelvic floor strength and leaking.

And, while every man is different when it comes to recovery from prostate surgery or other injury, the typical time frame to regain maximum control is within a year.

"Therapy is going to help you meet your maximum recovery," Dr. Hertz says. "And it's going to help you do that faster."

No referral is necessary to schedule your or your loved one's consultation. FYZICAL wants to help you start to LOVE YOUR LIFE again!



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