Impact of SA on the body: working with survivors of sexual assault to assist them in healing pelvic pain and pelvic floor dysfunction issues.
What is the Pelvic Floor?

- The pelvic floor consist of the various muscles, connective tissues, ligaments and nerves that make up the external to internal genitalia extending from the front of the pelvic bones to the sacrum, tailbone and the sides of the pelvic bones.

- These structures support the organs of the lesser pelvis; those organs are the bladder and urethra, uterus and vagina and rectum.
Pelvic Floor Anatomy
Pelvic Floor Anatomy Cont.
Pelvic Floor Anatomy
Pelvic Floor Anatomy Cont.
Pelvic Floor Anatomy Cont.

Pelvic Floor Muscles in a Healthy Woman

Uterus

Bladder

Urethra

Rectum
Pelvic Floor Anatomy Cont.
Function of the Pelvic Floor
Function of the Pelvic Floor

- As an adult, your pelvis is your body’s center of gravity. All movement originates from the pelvis; it is essential in everything you do.
The pelvic floor has 5 functions:
1. a sexual function
2. a toileting function
3. a stabilizing function (as it works with the deep muscles of your abdomen to provide core strength)
4. a supportive function of the organs of your pelvis
5. a sump pump function (as these muscles help to move waste fluid in your body).
Cultural and Historical Notes
Originally the vagina was seen as sacred and worshipped in most noted cultures dating from 25,000-15,000 BCE. The vagina was divine.

Though there is no definitive reason how the transition was made, but by about 400 BCE women and their vaginas became subordinate.

With the rise of the Christianity female sexuality and the vagina became wrong and shameful, unless married. Virginity became “good” and “pure”.

In the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries women were persecuted as witches throughout western societies who were seen as liberal or too sexual.

Societies current feelings on the vagina developed in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century; objectification, shame, scrutiny. Negative attitudes about the clitoris and an attempt to keep women under control.

Late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, early 20\textsuperscript{th} century feminist movements began
What has been your experience around your vagina, vulva, vestibule, clitoris or stereotypes around your sexuality?

i.e., stereotypes around being an African-American woman and sexual promiscuity

Female Genital Cutting

Rape as a tool of war

In India, women walking up stairs with their thighs touching to avoid unwanted touches.

This is important because?
Cultural and Historical Notes Cont.
The Pelvic Floor and it’s Energy Centers

- The pelvis is the energy center of your body which represents creativity, sexuality, emotions, personal power, relationships, sensuality, and finances.
- In the chakra system, the pelvis and its associated organs are considered the sacral (second) chakra and its color is orange.
Vulva Puppet!

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Trauma and the Pelvic Floor

“...THE VULNERABILITY OF THE VAGINA AS A MEDIATOR OF CONSCIOUSNESS”

NAOMI WOLF
How Trauma Affects the Pelvic Floor

Trauma to tissues can have many causes, including:

- Injury
- Infection
- Inflammation
- Surgery

Sexual assault or domestic violence can be a cause of injury, infection or inflammation to the tissues of the pelvic floor. And, if severe enough, may lead to surgical procedures which can bring more inflammation.
As a result of the causes of trauma, the tissues affected can thicken, produce scar tissue, cause muscle spasms and loose overall elasticity and mobility.

These restricted tissues and cause pain, muscle weakness and guarding and postural and alignment changes.
How Trauma Affects the Pelvic Floor Cont.

- Individuals may also have emotional holding patterns affecting their posture and alignment
How Trauma Affects the Pelvic Floor Cont.

- Muscles/tissues hold memory that connects with the brain. The affected tissues can hold tension around the emotions of the traumatic event.
- The brain affects the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), which controls the smooth muscle of our bodies, of which our vagina is affected. The vagina also affects the brain, which then also affects the ANS.
How Trauma Affects the Pelvic Floor Cont.

• Positive touch to the sexual organs produces neurotransmitters which give feelings of pleasure, self-confidence, decisiveness, connectedness.

• On the contrast, rape or sexual assault activates the sympathetic nervous system causing increases in the hormones which respond to “fight or flight or freeze”.
Releases of the affected tissues can produce an emotional response/release. This “letting go” assist the healing process. i.e.

- Sighing
- Crying
- Anger
Pelvic Floor Dysfunction
What is Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

- Pelvic floor dysfunction is a diagnosis that includes a wide range of sub diagnoses that deal with pain, weakness, nerve disorders, muscle and bone disorders, connective tissue disorders or restrictions and organ dysfunction in relation to the pelvic floor.
What is Pelvic Floor Dysfunction Cont.?

These dysfunctions include:
- Pelvic, abdominal, low back and hip pain and adhesions
- Vaginismus (Vaginal opening spasms)
- Dyspareunia (Pain with intercourse)
- Urinary and fecal incontinence
- Interstitial Cystitis and painful bladder syndrome
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Sexual dysfunction, i.e. not being able to have an orgasm when you prev. could
- Endometriosis (the lining of the uterus growing on tissue outside of the uterus)
- Vulvodynia (pain at the vulva)
- Vestibulodynia (pain at the vestibule)
- Nerve entrapment syndromes and sciatica
Healing Pelvic Floor Dysfunction
How to Help Healing: For the Survivor

- AWARENESS!!!
- Set on your healing journey with a love of self and life, where ever you are at the time, a positive attitude and an appreciation of being in the moment.
- Imagine yourself the way you want to be, the way you want to feel, where you want to be.
- For a few minutes write down all of these things. Make a list and prioritize which part of your physical healing you want to work on first.
- We can create our own health and it starts in the mind.

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How to Help Healing: For the Survivor

- Acknowledge your feelings on this journey, whatever they are, and recognize that they too are a part of the healing process.

- Know this is a safe place to release your emotions and we support and encourage you to release.

- Please note: The following exercises are recommendations only and are not a substitute for medical care. Please consult your physician regarding health issues and changes in an exercise or health regimen.

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How to Help Healing: For the Survivor

- Healing is a multi-layer process. It involves emotional, cognitive, spiritual and physical healing aspects.
- With physical therapy, avenues should be engaged in to support yourself cognitively, spiritually and emotionally as well.
- Most complete healing is completed when all layers are addressed.

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How to Help Healing: For the Survivor

Physical healing also includes:

- a regular exercise program inclusive of cardiovascular exercise, 30 min 3 x a week to your tolerance
- A good diet with some “live” foods, check further with a nutritionist
- Good sleeping patterns, 8 hours a night.
- Reducing stress, play time or “me” time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Probable Cause</th>
<th>New Thought Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdominal Cramps</td>
<td>Fear, Stopping the process.</td>
<td>I trust the process of life. I am safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammenorrhea: Absence of a menstrual period</td>
<td>Not wanting to be a woman. Dislike of the self.</td>
<td>I rejoice in who I am. I am a beautiful expression of life, flowering perfectly at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anorectal Bleeding</td>
<td>Anger and Frustration</td>
<td>I trust the process of life. Only right and good action is taking place in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anus See: Hemorrhoids</td>
<td>Releasing point. Dumping ground.</td>
<td>I easily and comfortably release that which I no longer need in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anus pain</td>
<td>Guilt. Desire for punishment. Not feeling good enough.</td>
<td>The past is over. I choose to love and approve of myself in the now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bladder Problems (Cystitis)</td>
<td>Anxiety. Holding on to old ideas. Fear of letting go. Being pissed off.</td>
<td>I comfortably and easily release the old and welcome the new in my life. I am safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowels (Problems)</td>
<td>Represent the release of waste. Fear of letting go of the old and no longer needed.</td>
<td>Letting go is easy. I freely and easily release the old and joyously welcome the new.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Thought Patterns for Healing Different Dis-Eases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Probable Cause</th>
<th>New Thought Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colon</td>
<td>Fear of letting go. Holding on to the past.</td>
<td>I easily release that which I no longer need. The past is over, and I am free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Refusing to release old ideas. Stuck in the past. Sometimes stinginess.</td>
<td>As I release the past, the new an fresh and vital enter. I allow life to flow through me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyst(s)</td>
<td>Running the old painful movie. Nursing hurts. A false growth.</td>
<td>The movies of my mind are beautiful because I choose to make them so. I love me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysmenorrhea</td>
<td>Anger at the self. Hatred of the body or of women.</td>
<td>I love my body. I love myself. I love all my cycles. All is well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endometriosis</td>
<td>Insecurity, disappointment, and frustration. Replacing self-love with sugar. Blamers</td>
<td>I am both powerful and desirable. It’s wonderful to be a woman. I love myself, and I am fulfilled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibroid Tumors and Cysts</td>
<td>Nursing a hurt from a partner. A blow to the feminine ego.</td>
<td>I release the pattern in me that attracted this experience. I create only good in my life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Thought Patterns for Healing Different Dis-eases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genitals</td>
<td>Represent the masculine and feminine principles.</td>
<td>It is safe to be who I am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitals - Problems</td>
<td>Worry about not being good enough</td>
<td>I rejoice in my own expression of life. I am perfect just as I am. I love and approve of myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incontinence</td>
<td>Emotional overflow. Years of controlling the emotions</td>
<td>I am willing to feel. It is safe for me to express my emotions. I love myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menstrual Problems</td>
<td>Rejection of one’s femininity. Guilt, fear. Belief that the genitals are sinful or dirty.</td>
<td>I accept my full power as a woman and accept all my bodily processes as normal and natural. I love and approve of myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovaries</td>
<td>Represent point of creation. Creativity.</td>
<td>I am balanced in my creative flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>Guilt. Guilt always seeks punishment.</td>
<td>I lovingly release the past. They are free and I am free. All is well in my heart now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)</td>
<td>Allowing confusion to reign. Giving power to outside influences. Rejection of the feminine processes.</td>
<td>I now take charge of my mind and my life. I am a powerful, dynamic woman! Every part of my body functions perfectly. I love me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[www.vitalselfpt.com](http://www.vitalselfpt.com)
### Thought Patterns for Healing Different Dis-eases

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pubic Bone</td>
<td>Represents Genital Protection</td>
<td>My sexuality is safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spasms</td>
<td>Tightening our thoughts through fear</td>
<td>I release, I relax and I let go. I am safe in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urethritis</td>
<td>Angry, emotions. Being pissed off. Blame</td>
<td>I only create joyful experiences in my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary Infections (Cystitis, Pyelonephritis)</td>
<td>Pissed off. Usually at the opposite sex or a lover. Blaming others.</td>
<td>I release the pattern in my consciousness that created this condition. I am willing to change. I love and approve of myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginitis</td>
<td>Anger at a mate. Sexual guilt. Punishing the self.</td>
<td>Others mirror the love and self-approval I have for myself. I rejoice in my sexuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulva</td>
<td>Represents vulnerability</td>
<td>It is safe to be vulnerable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ask the Questions!!!

1. Do you have pain with gyn exams, tampons or intercourse?
2. Do you have pain with the insertion of a speculum, tampon, penis or sex toy?
3. Do you have numbness or tingles around your genitals?
4. Do you have issues with constipation, or bowel issues?
5. Do you ever leak urine or stool?
6. Do you have unusually strong urges to urinate?
7. Do you experience low back or abdominal pain associated with urination, defecation or intercourse?
How to Help Survivor Healing: For the Advocate

- Make a referral to a physical therapist who specializes in pelvic floor dysfunction for further treatment as needed. Check your state regarding direct access.
- Check the website: [www.womenshealthapta.org](http://www.womenshealthapta.org) for a list of physical therapist in your area that specialize in pelvic floor dysfunction.
Getting Started!
Pelvic Floor Awareness!

Mirror at home
Seated on an exercise ball or folded towel
- Pelvic floor muscle lifts
- Pelvic floor muscle relaxation
- Pelvic floor muscle bulging,
- Pelvic clock

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Posture

Posture is important to maintain the bones and muscles in optimum alignment so they may function efficiently.

Ideal sitting posture maintains hips and knees at 90 degree angles, ears over shoulders and in line with the hip bones, feet flat on the floor. The low back should be supported with a lumbar support to avoid slouching and maintain the natural lumbar curve.

Ideal standing posture maintains ears over shoulders and in line with the hip and ankle bone. Maintaining the natural curves of the spine, in at the neck, out at the upper back, in at the lower back and out at the sacrum.
Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is important for several reasons: it helps to calm the nervous system, assist in mobilizing the abdominal and pelvic floor organs and muscles, it strengthens the diaphragm and it assists in mobilizing the lower ribs for breathing.

Inhale air through your nose letting your belly rise on the inhale. Try not to let your chest rise first.

Exhale air gently through pursed lips pulling the lower part of the abdomen gently back towards the spine. Do not tilt your pelvis. Maintain the small curve of your back.

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Diaphragmatic Breathing Part 2

On the inhale, allow your pelvic floor to relax and open. Imagine that your pelvic floor is a flower blossoming.

On the exhale, allow your pelvic floor to pull back in; as if a flower pulls back into a bud.

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Meditation and Relaxation

The practice of meditation is known to help calm the nervous system, relieve tension in muscles and provide relaxation. Daily meditation/prayer/quiet time is highly recommended to ease pelvic (or any kind of) pain. Meditation can help you become in touch with your inner guidance or intuition, which is necessary in understanding what your body needs in order to heal.

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Meditation and Relaxation Cont.

There are many different ways to meditate, the following are just suggestions:

- Lie or sit quietly. Imagine you have roots coming out of the bottoms of your feet. Anchor your feet into the earth. Release all tension, stress and pain out of your body, through your roots and into the earth. (Don’t worry, Mother Earth knows how to recycle that energy, although it’s good to give her some love too 😊) Now imagine yourself pulling up through your roots healing, loving energy. Let it enter your body from the bottoms of your feet through to the follicles of your hair. Now, imagine rays extending from the crown of your head into the universe. Bring in loving, healing energy from the universe and let it fill you from the top of your head to the bottoms of your feet. Let these energies circulate in your body and help you heal.

- Jacobson’s contract/relax

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Imagine your pelvis as a clock with 12 o’clock being your belly button, 6 o’clock being your pubic bone, 3 o’clock being the left side of your pelvic and 9 o’clock being the right side.

Start from neutral spine: your pelvic bones are in line with your pubic bone and you can place one flat hand under the arch in your back. Place your hands on the sides of your pelvis and remember to breathe.

Pull your belly button in and tilt your pelvis up, this is 12 o’clock

Release the contraction on your belly button and tilt the pelvis down, increasing the arch in your back, this is 6 o’clock
The Pelvic Clock Cont.

- Raise the left hip slightly, this is 3 o’clock.
- Raise the right hip slightly, this is 9 o’clock.
- Now, move (or tick) your pelvis slowly from 12 to 6 o’clock. Repeat 3-5 times.
- Tick your pelvis slowly from 3 to 6 o’clock. Repeat 3-5 times.
- Now, you are going to move your pelvis through the different points on the clock. Tick your pelvis clockwise from 12 to 3 to 6 to 9 and back to 12 o’clock. Repeat 3-5 times.
- Tick your pelvis counterclockwise from 12 to 9 to 6 to 3 and back to 12 o’clock. Repeat 3-5 times.
- Next we are going to do smooth circles. Rotate smoothly clockwise around the clock going through all of the times on the clock, from 12 to 1 to 2 to 3 to 4…etc., all the way around the clock until you reach 12 o’clock again. Repeat 3-5 times.
- Rotate smoothly counterclockwise all around the clock starting from 12 o’clock and ending at 12 o’clock. Repeat 3-5 times.
- If you find you have difficulty with the pelvic clock, it’s ok. Take the time you need to master the different exercises above. Just do one at a time for that day if that is what you need to focus on.
Stretching

The following stretches are to stretch the hip, abdominal and back muscles that either work in coordination with the pelvic floor muscles or surround the pelvic floor muscles. By stretching these muscles you will help to release the pelvic floor.

General Rules for Stretching: STRETCH DAILY

- Only stretch within your available limits and to your tolerance
- If at any point you feel shooting pain or tingles, nerve types of pain, stop the stretch
- Incorporate your diaphragmatic breathing into your stretching and relax
- Be aware of your pelvic floor muscles and shoulders, making sure you are not tensing them in trying to stretch the other muscles
- Do not bounce a stretch, hold it static the duration of the stretch
- Perform the stretches on both legs/both sides as relevant
- Minimally hold stretches for 10 seconds, maximally to 60 seconds.

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Basic Stretches

**Cobra Pose**
Lay on your stomach and push up onto extended arms. Try to bring your pelvis towards the floor. Hold 15-30 seconds, or your tolerance. If this pose increases back pain or sends shooting pains into legs or back, do not do this pose.

**Child’s Pose**
While sitting on your knees, bring your bottom down towards your feet and reach your arms forwards. Allow your back to curve, tailbone curl under as you stretch. Hold for 30 seconds or to tolerance.

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Basic Stretches Cont.

Hamstring Doorway/Wall Corner Stretch

Lie on your back with one leg up against the wall/door frame and the other leg straight, flat on the floor. Keep the knees straight. If too difficult to be directly against the wall/door frame, back up some until comfortable. Hold 30 seconds.

Seated Hamstring Stretch

While seated, place right leg up on another chair, place your hands on your right thigh, keep your toes pointed up. Lean forward keeping your back straight to increase the stretch, if you can tolerate it. Hold 30 seconds.

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Basic Stretches Cont.

Supine Piriformis Stretch

Lie on your back and bend right knee while keeping the foot flat on the ground. Make a “figure 4” with the left leg and place left lower leg on top of the right thigh. Reach under the thigh of the right leg and pull both legs up towards yourself. You should feel the stretch in your “figure 4” leg. Hold 30 seconds.

Seated Piriformis Stretch

While seated, place one ankle on top of the thigh of the opposite leg that is on the floor. Keep your back straight. Lean forward to increase the stretch if you can tolerate. Be careful not to have the ankle bone on top of the thigh. Hold 30 seconds.

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Basic Stretches Cont.

**Supine Inner Thigh Stretch**

Lie on your back and let your knees fall gently to the sides as pictured above. Keep your feet together. Do not tuck your tailbone. If stretch is too much, place pillows under your knees for support. Gently press on the inner thighs for an additional stretch if tolerated. Hold 30 seconds.

**Seated Inner Thigh Stretch**

While seated, separate your legs and point your toes outwards. Gently press your knees outwards as to feel a stretch on the inner thighs. Hold 30 seconds.

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Basic Stretches Cont.

**Kneeling Hip Flexor Stretch**

From a kneeling position, place left leg out in front as in above picture. Press forward through your pelvis until you feel a gentle stretch in the front of the right pelvis and thigh. Hold 30 seconds.

**Standing Hip Flexor Stretch**

While standing, place foot on a chair, as pictured above. Make sure the chair is stable or against a wall. Press forwards through your pelvis until you feel a stretch at the front of the right pelvis and thigh. Hold 30 seconds.
Hygiene and Vulvar Care

- Some basic rules of hygiene, especially with vulvar pain, are:
- Wipe from front to back
- Avoid the use of products which have fragrance and dye, i.e., toilet paper and tampons
- Wear white cotton underwear and sleep without underwear or a bottom
- Avoid tight clothing/pants
- Pat dry your vulvar region after bathing, don’t rub or use a lot of friction
- Calendula cream is good for vulvar irritation as an anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and it subdues pain; test on the inside of your wrist first for allergies. Aloe vera gel is also an anti-inflammatory, check for allergies.
- Sitz baths can be helpful as well
- Avoid douching and chlorinated water
- With intercourse, avoid lubricants that contain propylene glycol, all natural organic is best. Olive oil may be used. Test a little on the inside of your wrist for allergies
- After intercourse, urinate and use a squeegee bottle to rinse the vulvar region with cool water, covered ice packs may also be used for 10 minutes.
Toileting and Defecation Mechanics

In order to put less strain on your pelvic floor a few good tips to utilize when defecating are:

- Make sure your knees are higher than your hips
- Use a stool or a phone book under your feet, if you don’t have one, go up on your toes
- Lean forward keeping your back straight
- Place your elbows on your thighs
- Inhale and let your belly get big
- Exhale making a hissing sound or a “haaa” sound and bear down gently
- Do not strain or hold your breath
- If it isn’t working, get up, take a walk, perform an abdominal massage and try again later when you get the urge.
- Try to avoid constipation

With urination, always try to sit down on the commode. Squatting over a commode does not allow your muscles to relax completely and can lead to you not emptying your bladder completely.

www.vitalselfpt.com
Diet and Nutrition for the Pelvic Floor

Maintaining a healthy bladder and digestive system is vital in pelvic floor health. An irritated bladder can cause pelvic pain as well as a cramping and constipated colon. Some basic tips for nutrition are:

- Get 20-35 grams of soluble and insoluble fiber a day. Remember if you increase fiber you have to increase water intake.
- Cooked vegetables are easier on the digestive system for those individuals who have issues with digestion. [www.ibsgroup.org](http://www.ibsgroup.org) is a website for the Irritable Bowel Association and has further information on diet for irritable bowels.
- Drink half of your weight in ounces in water a day. If not water let the beverage be non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic and non-carbonated. Not getting enough fluid can concentrate the urine and concentrated urine can irritate the bladder.
- Caffeine and alcohol can be dehydrating so limiting consumption can be helpful.
- Spicy, curried, citrus, acidic and caffeinated foods and beverages are all potential bladder irritants. See the website [www.ic-network.com](http://www.ic-network.com) for a full list of bladder irritants.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners and simple sugars such as sweets and white pastas.
Additional Information

WHAT OTHER TREATMENTS I PROVIDE AS A PHYSICAL THERAPIST.
Questions??????
This concludes this workshop. I pray that the information received is beneficial to you or who you support and can assist on the path to healing. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your journey.

PEACE, LOVE AND MANY BLESSINGS
Bibliography and Resources


