

# 4th Trimester Care

*Awareness Day*



Pennsylvania Campaign  
by  
Senator Katie Muth and  
APTA Pennsylvania

May 26, 2021

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# “On a daily basis, I saw a need for change”

“As a mother and Women’s Health pelvic floor physical therapist, I have been affected and disappointed in our healthcare system with the lack of postpartum physical and mental support. Through my own experiences, through my friends, and especially my patients, I decided to contact my state senator and try to do something for this crucial postpartum time commonly known as the “Fourth Trimester.”

- Gina Cunningham, PT, DPT, WCS

Board Certified Women’s/Pelvic Health Clinical Specialist

Pennsylvania State Representative of the APTA Academy of Pelvic Health Physical Therapy

# 4th Trimester Care Awareness Resolution

- PA State Senator Katie Muth's office is proposing a resolution to the senate to dedicate a day to 4th Trimester Care to help raise awareness to the needs of women in the postpartum period
- <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?year=2019&sind=0&body=S&type=R&bn=0354>
- The proposed date is May 26<sup>th</sup> 2021

# Postpartum Maternal Health Care in the United States

- 4 million women give birth each year in the US. Childbirth related care is the most common reason for hospitalization in the US.<sup>1</sup>
- Women in the US are more likely to die of pregnancy related complications than in 49 other countries, including nearly all European countries, Canada and several countries in Asia and the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>
- Postpartum maternal health care is a neglected aspect of women's health care.
- Maternal mortality and morbidity rates are increasing.
  - Maternal deaths happen not in pregnancy or delivery, but in the postpartum period.<sup>2</sup>
- In a national survey, ~ 1/3 of mothers who felt their health concerns were not addressed.<sup>3</sup>
  - US women typically receive ONE 6-week postpartum checkup which is limited to a vaginal examination and contraceptive education
- 1 in 4 new mothers return to work two weeks after giving birth<sup>10</sup> due to lack of paid family leave.

# What is the 4th Trimester?

- The partum period following childbirth
- There is no consensus on exactly how long this postpartum period lasts<sup>4</sup>
  - Each woman's process after childbirth is unique
- US women receive one postpartum check-up 4-6 weeks postpartum
  - Typically cleared to return to sexual activity and exercise by OB/midwife

# Current Recommendations for the 4th Trimester

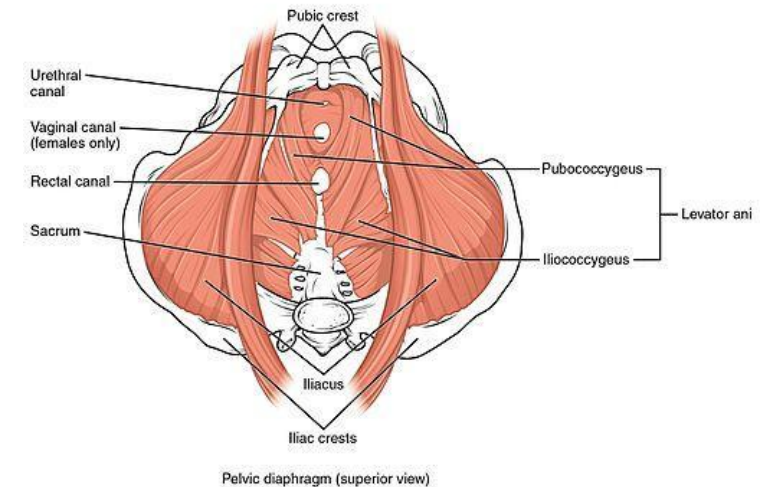
- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) now recommends postpartum care should be an ongoing process, rather than a single encounter and all women have contact with their OBGYNs or other Obstetric care providers within the first 3 weeks postpartum. <sup>5</sup>
- **NEWSFLASH: ACOG's own recommendations are not happening!!!**
- **A woman should also be seeing a pelvic physical therapist and be screened by a mental health therapist.**

# What is the pelvic floor?

“All visceral, neurovascular, and myofascial, structures contained in the bony pelvic from pubis to coccyx and between lateral ischial wall”<sup>6</sup>

Group of muscles within the pelvic girdle that:

- Supports the pelvic organs
- Sphincteric of the outlets including urethra, vagina and anus
- Sexual appreciation
- Stabilization - assists with postural core control



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1115\\_Muscles\\_of\\_the\\_Pelvic\\_Floor.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1115_Muscles_of_the_Pelvic_Floor.jpg)

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# The Pelvic Floor Muscles and Pregnancy

- The pelvic floor muscles have to work extra hard during pregnancy to support the growing uterus
  - Kegels are often recommended to a pregnant woman but could be contraindicated in some situations, for instance pain
  - The pelvic floor actually needs to relax and stretch during a vaginal delivery
- Pelvic floor muscles are affected with cesarean births due to fascial connections
- Women are not always trained how to effectively push to deliver
  - You wouldn't show up the day of a marathon without training beforehand.
- You may not realize the muscles are causing issues unless assessed by a trained physical therapist
  - If you injured your shoulder, it would be assessed by a PT before being prescribed exercises



# Common issues seen postpartum

- Pelvic floor trauma
- Pelvic and coccyx pain
- Urinary and fecal incontinence
- Diastasis recti
- Constipation
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Scar tissue pain
  - either cesarean, episiotomy, or natural tearing
- Hemorrhoids
- Pubic symphysis separation
- Painful intercourse
- Breastfeeding problems
- Infections
- Physical exhaustion
- Sleep loss
- Depression and stress
- Anxiety and rage, loneliness
- Frequent headaches
- Heavy bleeding
- Backache
- Weight control

# Postpartum Physical Therapy Interventions are Important

- Many women are not always told by their OBGYN or know that physical therapy is an option
- Risk of urinary incontinence increases 2.6 fold after pregnancy and childbirth, 50% of women continue to experience urinary incontinence at 1 year postpartum, and 10-29% at 4 years postpartum.<sup>8</sup>
- 25-50% of women experience pelvic organ prolapse during 1st year postpartum<sup>9</sup>
- 80 percent of women who have vaginal deliveries have experienced tearing of the pelvic skin and muscles.<sup>10</sup>
- Athletes can strain a muscle in their shoulder or knee and go to PT for 12 weeks however
  - **Woman have cesarean SURGERY or TEAR their pelvic floor MUSCLES and do not receive any type of therapy while also trying to take care of a newborn while healing ~ doesn't make sense!**

# Postpartum Physical Therapy Interventions are Important

- ACOG recently acknowledged gaps in postpartum care and updated recommendations to include physical therapy as part of maternal recovery from birth to address urinary and fecal incontinence.<sup>5</sup>
- Physical therapy should be considered immediately postpartum to address
  - diastasis recti abdominis (DRA), pelvic organ prolapse (POP), and pain<sup>7</sup>

# How Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy Can Help

- Assessment
  - Pelvic floor strength
  - Muscle tone/tightness
  - Movement and function
  - Orthopedic pelvic dysfunction
  - Presence of functional diastasis recti
  - Presence of functional prolapse
  - Bowel or bladder issues
  - Urinary and fecal incontinence - never normal!
  - Scar mobility and pain
  - Sexual concerns
- Education
  - Biomechanics with childcare
  - Return to exercise
- Skilled physical therapy to manage musculoskeletal pelvic disorders



# Postpartum Mental Health

- Correlation with postpartum depression (PPD)
  - PPD symptoms were three times more likely in women who had back and pelvic pain than those who did not<sup>11</sup>
- PT's can screen patients for PPD prior to their six week check up with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
- Exercise postpartum helps to reduce depression rates. It's important for women to return to exercise safely without pain<sup>12</sup>

# Breastfeeding And Resources To Help

- Lactation consultants
  - provide assistance with breastfeeding issues whether it is latching issues or preventing/managing mastitis and many other issues
- Physical therapists can help mothers treat clogged ducts using a variety of techniques including but not limited to manual therapy and ultrasound
  - As experts in biomechanics, PT's also address body mechanics to make breastfeeding more successful and less painful

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— May 26, 2021

- Please reach out to your local State Senator

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- Attend Live Webinar to present our resolution to Congress
- Help us:
  - Bring awareness to the 4th trimester period
  - Encourage a standard of care for women for physical and mental health

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