

FIERA BLOG

THAT'S NOT FUNNY: WHAT URINARY LEAKS HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR SEX LIFE

Kristy Lin Billuni, 10/17/16



I grew up spending lots of time with three wonderful older ladies: my grandmother, her sister, and their mother, my great-grandmother. This jolly trio told stories, carried vinyl, shoulder-strap purses full of candies and treasures, and went everywhere together.

And they laughed. Oh, how they laughed. They often stirred each other into laughter tizzies, belly-laughing until they cried, which was funny to them and would make them laugh even harder, wiping their eyes and begging, “Oh, Mercy!” “Oh, my Lord!” as their hysteria crescendoed.

And then, always shocking to me, one of them would announce that she had peed!

Peeing themselves never seemed to be that big of a shame to them—maybe a

grandmothers didn't mind their bladder control problems, but as an adult, I don't think it's so funny. More than that, as a sex educator, I know that bladder control has something to do with pelvic floor muscles, and that pelvic floor muscles have a lot to do with sexual function.

As far as I'm concerned, sexual function is serious business.

So I asked my friend, Mags Chuang Matthews, to help me understand more about the pelvic floor and what it does. Mags is a physical therapist who specializes in women's pelvic and reproductive health, and she's part-owner of [Alive](#), a physical therapy practice in Nevada City, California.

"The pelvic floor looks like a thick hammock or sling of muscle at the base of our spine, connecting from the pubic bone to the tailbone and our sit bones," Mags explained. "It has three important jobs to keep us healthy and happy. First, it's the gatekeeper for sanitation and child birth. Second, it stabilizes the pelvis and lower back. And third, it supports sexual pleasure."

I asked her to get more specific about the pelvic floor's sanitation gatekeeper role. "If you pee with exertion—sneeze, laugh hard, jump, or just stand up—the pressure pushing out is higher than the pressure coming from your pelvic floor," Mags said. "If your pelvic floor muscles are weak, your body is like a tube of toothpaste with the cap loose. A little bit of pressure from the tube (your belly) pushes the toothpaste out. If your pelvic floor muscles are strong, the toothpaste cap is on tight, and no leakage happens."

Mags went on to tell me how the pelvic floor stabilizes the back and pelvis, "naturally tightening before efforts like using your arms and legs, or with pelvic thrusting." And that led us right to the sex. "Good sex involves a lot more than just healthy pelvic floor muscles," Mags reminded me. "But strong and flexible pelvic floor muscles allow for better sex."

Besides stabilizing your lower back for pelvic thrusting, decreasing back pain, and increasing options for sexual positions, the pelvic floor controls a range of sexual functions. "Our pelvic floor muscles tighten for increased pressure and pleasure at the vaginal canal, relax to allow penetration, and create strong, fast contractions

...cles pump more blood in and orication, and sensation."

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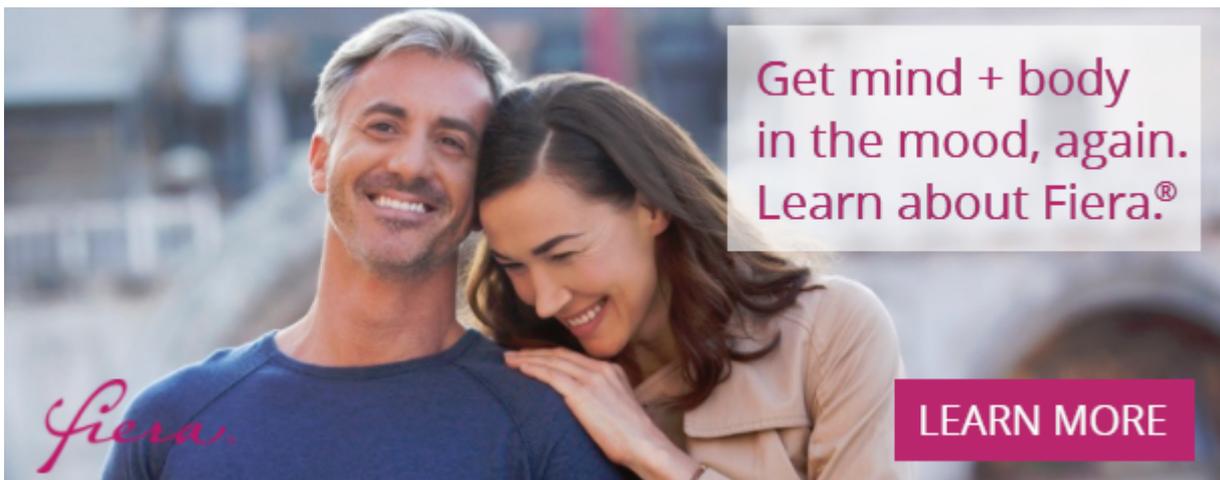
...en have survived on so little inary leaks my grandmothers tion with a little attention to this tips.

pelvic floor. Normally, healthy pelvic floor muscles will automatically tighten against the pressure. If you are in the habit of holding your breath when you stand or lift, you probably have trained your pelvic floor muscles to relax and stretch with exertion, which weakens them. So, the easiest thing to do is to blow out when you stand up. A strong exhale will automatically train your pelvic floor muscles to work by lifting the muscular sling instead of ballooning out. Then graduate to blowing out with any effort; lifting, jumping, pushing, moving furniture, lifting suitcases or your golf clubs.”

DO YOUR KEGELS.

If you’ve never heard of Kegels, start with these [excellent instructions from Dr. Leah Millheiser](#) on the Fiera blog. Mags added: “Practice your Kegels when you are relaxed, and be sure to blow out with the squeeze. A healthy pelvic floor should be able to squeeze with either inhale or exhale, but exhaling with a Kegel is best for beginners and helps retrain the nervous system to keep you from leaking. Once you get the hang of Kegels alone, then add them to your physical exertions. Squeeze when you stand, lift, push, laugh, and sneeze. If you already leak with effort, start the Kegel squeeze with whatever makes you leak.”

My grandmother passed away over a decade ago, her mother and sister too, but they left me with so many gifts: one of those gifts was their capacity for joy and laughter. Whenever I belly-laugh to tears, I think of them. I love to laugh, and I guess it’s in my genes. I’m glad my grandmothers didn’t teach me to be ashamed of a little bladder leak, but I also wish, for their sakes, that somebody had taught them about their pelvic floor muscles and Kegels.



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