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Physiotherapy in treating sexual pain disorders in women: A systematic review

Mercedes Blanquet Rochera
University Ramon Llull, Spain

Statement of the problem: A lot of women suffer from sexual dysfunctions, which most of the times cause pain and discomfort. Many genito-pelvic pain disorders appear in the form of contractions or pelvic floor muscle tension; this makes any type of penetration (sexual, tampons, gynaecological examination tools) impossible. In this condition, a woman cannot control these muscle contractions and experiences moderate to intense pain.

Objectives: Objectives of the study was to summarize the published evidence on the efficacy of physiotherapy for treating female sexual pain disorders, ways to evaluate the condition of a patient and to find the correct treatment.

Findings: Physiotherapy techniques are used to strengthen pelvic floor muscles and relieve pain. Kegel exercises improve the symptoms of sexual pain disorders as they deal with weakened muscles. Vaginal cones exercises are used to strengthen the muscles by means of introduction of gradually increasing weights in the vagina. Biofeedback helps to increase muscle awareness and auto-evaluation of performed exercises. Thermotherapy relaxes muscles and increases elasticity of tissues which helps to reduce pain. Electro-stimulation improves the functionality of muscles. Myofascial therapy consists mainly in manual therapy and in liberating painful trigger points.

Conclusions: The role of pelvic physiotherapy is to solve the problems related to sexual pain, recovering the pelvic floor by increasing muscle awareness and proprioception, improving muscle relaxation, toning the muscles and increasing the elasticity of the tissues in order to eliminate or reduce pain. Different exercise techniques, biofeedback, manual therapy and insertion techniques, as well as electro-stimulation and thermotherapy are used to achieve positive results.

merblanquet@gmail.com