Interview with Mary O’Dwyer on My Pelvic Flaw

1. Why do you say that drawing in the waist is one of women’s worst habits?
   If a woman continually draws her abdomen in at the waist, her brain may learn to constantly switch on these muscles when she lifts or works out at the gym. When we cough or lift, we should automatically tension our pelvic floor and deep abdominals, but instead we learn forceful drawing back at the waist. This in turn creates more pressure inside the abdomen which pushes down onto, and can overwhelm the pelvic floor.

2. Do athletic women have strong pelvic floor muscles?
   Studies show that 28 to 52% of elite female athletes have stress and or urge incontinence. Often athletic women have pelvic floors that are held too tightly and this makes them weak and uncoordinated.

3. Does a Caesarian section protect you against pelvic floor problems?
   Childbirth is a cause of muscle damage with some difficult births. However, researchers show that after vaginal delivery 42% of women have some incontinence and prolapse. The C section mums had a 35% rate of incontinence and prolapse. Women who have a C section usually don't think about rehabilitating the deep abdominal and pelvic floor after delivery.

4. Sit ups and crunches are recommended to flatten the stomach, so why do you say these exercises may be wrong for women?
   Sit ups cause a big rise in intra abdominal pressure which pushes down onto the pelvic floor. If a woman has a pre weakened pelvic floor, or no idea of how to tension her floor, these abdominal exercises can aggravate incontinence and prolapse. Abdominal muscles are not meant to be trained in isolation- the deeper and outer abdominal groups are meant to all tension together in a co-coordinated pattern. Training abdominal muscles in isolation risks training a faulty pattern of movement.

5. Surely surgery can repair any problems down the track?
   Surgery can restore a woman's quality of life and improved bladder and bowel function. We need to adopt the mind set of prevention rather than relying on surgery as a quick fix. Researchers show that 38% of women post hysterectomy suffer from sexual dysfunction (pain with intercourse, less vaginal sensation, decreased orgasm). 30% of women re prolapse again after repair surgery.

6. Can pelvic floor exercises improve orgasms?
   Research shows that women who have incontinence and sexual dysfunction report a high rate of improvement in their orgasm and vaginal sensation after a programme of pelvic floor muscles retraining. Strong pelvic floor muscles = stronger orgasm.

7. What everyday habits help pelvic floor function throughout life?
   Sitting upright keeps the pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles switched on
   Relax a tightly held waist
   Breathe in by opening your stomach out
   Learn to tension your pelvic floor muscles as you breathe out
   Control an urgent bladder by emptying no more than 5 or 6 times a day
   Eat adequate fiber rich foods to avoid straining to empty the bowel
8. What was your inspiration behind the book?
    My patients - women's quality of life, self esteem, ability to exercise and personal relationships can be dramatically affected by pelvic floor dysfunction. I wrote this book to transform women's knowledge of their pelvic floor and to learn the correct information to teach their daughters and help change the present epidemic of pelvic floor problems.

9. Have you always wanted to be a writer? What was the turning point that cemented your career?
    I thought I was the most unlikely person to write a book. The turning point happened after years of hearing women say 'Why didn't someone tell me this before?' or 'Where can I get this information to send my daughter?' I would sit there with a goofy look on my face and say 'Well there's not much available'. Eventually I had to do something about this information gap in women's pelvic floor knowledge.

10. What types of books do you like to read?
    I mostly read non fiction (love Maryanne Williamson) and will read any of Tim Winton's work.

11. How lengthy is the process behind writing?
    This book took 2 years of solid work from start to finish.

12. What is your favorite part of being a writer?
    The feedback I get about how the information has helped change someone's life.

Other flaws highlighted include:

- Lifting heavy objects. Recent Scandinavian study showed that when compared with the normal population, assistant nurses had a 60% increased risk of developing lumbar disc or vaginal prolapse due to heavy lifting.
- Thinking that a Caesarean delivery protects a woman from pelvic floor damage. Studies show that 42% of women who deliver vaginally have incontinence and prolapse, compared to 35% of women who deliver by C section.
- Thinking that female athletes have strong pelvic floors. Studies show that up to 52% of elite female athletes have stress and or urge incontinence (these women had no children)
- Accepting sexual dysfunction. Loss of vaginal sensation, a weaker orgasm or urine loss with intercourse can lessen a woman's desire to have sex. Research has shown marked improvements in their sexual function after improving their incontinence and prolapse.
- My Pelvic Flaw will show you how to find and control your pelvic floor muscles, regain bladder control, strengthen your orgasm, prevent and control vaginal collapse, recover after pelvic surgery and control your stomach muscles after childbirth.
- Ms O'Dwyer hopes that all women can benefit from her expertise and talk about it to their mothers, daughters, friends, cousins and aunts to help prevent pelvic floor problems throughout life.