

## Urogynaecology

# Pelvic floor clinic

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### What is the pelvic floor clinic?

The pelvic floor clinic is a specialist clinic managed by urogynaecologists (doctors who manage problems related to the bladder, vagina and muscles in the pelvis). We specialise in assessing women who have had a third- or fourth-degree perineal tear because of childbirth, also known as an obstetric anal sphincter injury (OASI).

### What is a third- and fourth-degree perineal tear/obstetric anal sphincter injury (OASI)?

This is a tear between the vagina and the anus (back passage) involving the muscles that surround the anus, known as the anal sphincter.

There are 2 portions of the anal sphincter:

- the inner ring (known as the internal sphincter)
- the outer ring (known as the external sphincter).

These muscles control the passing of stools (poo) and wind from your back passage. Third- and fourth-degree tears occur in approximately 3 out of 100 vaginal deliveries. They are graded according to the depth of the tear:

- 3a = less than half of external sphincter is torn
- 3b = more than half of the external sphincter is torn
- 3c = both the external and internal sphincter are torn
- 4th = both sphincters and the skin lining the anal canal are torn

Women who have an OASI are more likely to suffer from faecal urgency (needing to rush to the bathroom to open bowels) and faecal incontinence (not being able to control the opening of bowels) than women who do not have an OASI.

For more information about third- and fourth-degree perineal tears/obstetric anal sphincter injuries, visit the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) website: [rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/perineal-tears-and-episiotomies-in-childbirth/third-and-fourth-degree-tears-oasi](http://rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/perineal-tears-and-episiotomies-in-childbirth/third-and-fourth-degree-tears-oasi)

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## Why you have been asked to attend the pelvic floor clinic

You have been invited to this clinic as you have either recently had a baby and have an OASI or you are currently pregnant and had an OASI in a previous pregnancy. You could also have been referred to our clinic if another doctor or physiotherapist has asked us to assess you due to ongoing problems you may have with controlling your bowels.

## How should I prepare for my pelvic floor clinic appointment?

There are no special preparations required. However, it would be helpful if you could empty your bowels and bladder before arrival. Please plan for your baby or small children to be looked after on the day of your appointment as we are unable to care for them in our department.

On the day, please arrive at least 10 minutes before your scheduled appointment. If you are running late, please call and let us know as soon as possible. We will do our best to see you if you are late, but we may have to reschedule your appointment.

When you arrive, please check in at the reception. A healthcare assistant will provide you with a symptom questionnaire to complete.

## What happens during my pelvic floor clinic appointment?

You will meet the doctor. They will review your medical record and ask you questions related to your bowel function. Please use this opportunity to talk about any concerns you have about your perineal tear.

You will be then offered 3 examinations (explained below). If you agree to be examined, you will be asked to undress from the waist down (including your underwear) and lie on your back on the examination couch. A single-use covering will be provided to you and a chaperone (usually a female staff member) will be available during the exams.

The 3 examinations include:

### Examination of the perineum and vagina

This involves a visual examination of the pelvic floor. The doctor will inspect your external genitalia (perineum) to ensure that the tear has fully healed from the outside. They may also examine you internally to check the vagina has healed. If you have any concerns about your healing, please let the doctor know.

### Anal manometry testing

This test measures the strength of the muscles around the back passage. It involves inserting a fine, flexible tube (about 3 millimetres (mm) in thickness) into the back passage. This is usually

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done while you are lying on your left-hand side, so the doctor will ask you to turn over for this test. The tube is sterile and inserted approximately 3 to 4 centimetres (cm) into your back passage using lubrication. The doctor will ask you to relax first and then to squeeze your back passage muscles against the tube and will take measurements (usually 3 measurements). This test lasts for up to a minute.

## Endo-anal ultrasound scan.

This test uses inaudible sound waves (ultrasound) to assess the structure of the ring of muscles around the back passage (internal and external anal sphincters). It involves the gentle insertion of an ultrasound probe (about the thickness of your index finger) 3 to 4cm into the back passage. The probe is lubricated and covered with a single-use probe cover. This test lasts for up to 30 seconds. We will record images of these muscles as they will be used as part of your medical records.

Once the investigations are complete and you are dressed, the doctor will discuss the findings with you and make their recommendations for management. You will also be given the opportunity to ask further questions.

## What are the benefits of attending the pelvic floor clinic?

Attending the pelvic floor clinic gives you the opportunity to speak with a specialist and address any concerns you may have above your perineal tear or any symptoms you may have developed because of childbirth.

Performing anal manometry and endo-anal ultrasound scans are the best ways of assessing the quality of the repair and how your bowel functions are after a third- or fourth-degree perineal tear.

If you are being assessed during your pregnancy, we can offer advice and make recommendations to you and your obstetric and midwifery teams based on our investigations. This will allow you to make the most informed decision on how you choose to deliver your baby.

If you are having ongoing problems with your bowel function, we can give you advice on how to manage these symptoms, as well as refer you to our team of specialised pelvic floor physiotherapists.

## What are the risks and side effects of the investigations performed in the pelvic floor clinic?

Ultrasound examination of the back passage and anal manometry testing are **safe and pose no risk to you or your baby** (if you are pregnant). The probe and the tube can be a little uncomfortable when they are inserted but every attempt will be made to minimise the discomfort caused to you. You can ask the doctor to stop the test at any time.

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## What are the alternatives to attending the pelvic floor clinic?

Attending the clinic is **not compulsory** and if you decline the offer of an appointment with us it will not affect your care in any way. If you have recently sustained an OASI at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, you will be automatically referred to our team of physiotherapists. If you are currently pregnant you can discuss your symptoms and options for birth with your obstetrician or midwife during your antenatal clinic appointments.

## Helpful resources

- **RCOG perineal tears hub** [www.rcog.org.uk/tears](http://www.rcog.org.uk/tears)
- **Mothers with Anal Sphincter Injuries in Childbirth (MASIC)** [masic.org.uk](http://masic.org.uk)
- **Birth Trauma Association** [www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk](http://www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk)

## Who should I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, or need to change your appointment, you can contact us on the number or appointments email below.

Tel: **020 3312 1752**

Opening times: 09.00 – 17.00

Email: [imperial.gynaecology.opdsmh@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.gynaecology.opdsmh@nhs.net)

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

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## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

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