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## REHABILITATION OF PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE: CYSTOCELE

**Abstract:** Cystocele, a type of pelvic organ prolapse (POP) where the bladder herniates into the vaginal wall, is a prevalent yet under-discussed condition affecting a significant percentage of women, particularly post-menopausal women and those with a history of childbirth. While surgical options exist, conservative rehabilitation through physical therapy offers effective alternatives or adjuncts to surgery. This article examines the latest rehabilitation strategies for cystocele, with an emphasis on targeted exercise regimens, behavioral interventions, biofeedback, and lifestyle modifications that enhance outcomes, restore pelvic function, and improve quality of life.

**Introduction.** Pelvic organ prolapse (POP) affects up to 50% of parous women, with cystocele being one of the most common forms. Cystocele can result from weakened pelvic floor muscles and connective tissue, often exacerbated by childbirth, menopause, obesity, and chronic straining. Symptoms range from a sensation of heaviness or bulging in the vaginal area to urinary incontinence and difficulties with voiding, significantly impacting physical, social, and psychological well-being. With a growing focus on minimally invasive approaches, rehabilitation strategies for cystocele have gained prominence as either primary or adjunct treatments to surgery. This article explores the advanced rehabilitative protocols and their evidence-based efficacy for managing cystocele.

**Pathophysiology of Cystocele.** Cystocele occurs when the supportive tissue between the bladder and vagina weakens, allowing the bladder to drop or prolapse into the vagina. This weakening is often associated with:

1. Childbirth Trauma: Vaginal delivery, particularly forceps-assisted, can overstretch or tear pelvic support structures.
2. Hormonal Changes: Estrogen deficiency post-menopause weakens collagen in pelvic tissues, contributing to structural compromise.
3. Chronic Strain: Chronic coughing, constipation, and heavy lifting increase intra-abdominal pressure, gradually worsening prolapse.

Understanding the underlying pathophysiology is crucial in designing rehabilitation programs that address specific anatomical and functional impairments in cystocele patients.

### Assessment and Diagnosis.

Standard diagnostic measures include:

**Physical Examination:** A clinical assessment of prolapse severity, typically staged from 0 (no prolapse) to 4 (complete prolapse).

**Imaging:** MRI or ultrasound for assessing structural integrity and to visualize the extent of prolapse.

**Symptom Scoring Tools:** The Pelvic Floor Distress Inventory (PFDI-20) and Pelvic Organ Prolapse Distress Inventory (POPDI) help quantify symptoms and guide treatment decisions.

**Functional Assessment:** Evaluating muscle strength and coordination of the pelvic floor muscles (PFM) using biofeedback or manometry.

These assessments inform individualized rehabilitation plans tailored to the severity and functional impairment of the cystocele.

### Rehabilitation Techniques

#### 1. Pelvic Floor Muscle Training (PFMT).

- Pelvic floor muscle training is the cornerstone of conservative cystocele management. Evidence-based guidelines recommend PFMT as a first-line treatment to improve bladder support and symptom control.
- Protocol: PFMT protocols typically involve 10–15 contractions held for 5–10 seconds, repeated 2–3 times daily. It is essential to include both slow-twitch and fast-twitch muscle fibers to optimize strength and responsiveness.
- Supervised Training: Studies indicate that supervised sessions with a pelvic floor therapist enhance adherence and outcomes compared to unsupervised home training.

**Outcomes:** Consistent PFMT can reduce the severity of prolapse by at least one stage, improve bladder control, and alleviate symptoms of heaviness and discomfort.

#### 2. Biofeedback

- Biofeedback provides real-time feedback on pelvic muscle contractions, allowing patients to optimize muscle activation.
- Implementation: Biofeedback involves placing sensors on the pelvic floor muscles, with visual or auditory cues given in response to muscle activity.
- Efficacy: Randomized controlled trials show that biofeedback improves PFMT efficacy, particularly for patients struggling with correct muscle isolation.

#### 3. Electrical Stimulation

- Electrical stimulation (ES) aids in recruiting pelvic floor muscles, especially in patients with weakened or underactive muscles.
- Method: Low-frequency electrical currents are applied via vaginal or perineal electrodes to stimulate contractions.
- Indications: ES is often recommended when initial PFMT fails or when patients lack proprioceptive awareness of their pelvic floor muscles.

**Outcomes:** Studies demonstrate that ES, particularly in combination with PFMT, can enhance muscle strength and reduce prolapse symptoms.

#### 4. Behavioral and Lifestyle Modifications

- Behavioral interventions focus on lifestyle changes that reduce intra-abdominal pressure and strain on pelvic tissues.
- Weight Management: Maintaining a healthy weight reduces excess pressure on the pelvic floor.
- Bladder Training: Timed voiding and urge suppression techniques help manage urinary incontinence associated with cystocele.
- Avoiding Heavy Lifting: Educating patients on proper lifting techniques or avoiding excessive lifting prevents strain on the pelvic floor.

#### 5. Pessary Use

- Pessaries are silicone devices inserted into the vagina to support the bladder and relieve prolapse symptoms.
- Indications: Pessaries are ideal for patients who seek a non-surgical option or those who cannot undergo surgery.
- Types: Ring pessaries are commonly used for mild to moderate cystocele; Gellhorn pessaries offer more support for advanced cases.

Outcomes: Pessary use, combined with PFMT, has been shown to reduce prolapse symptoms effectively and improve quality of life.

#### Recent Advances in Rehabilitation

Emerging technologies and techniques are revolutionizing cystocele rehabilitation: Ultrasound-Guided PFMT: Using ultrasound to visualize pelvic floor contractions improves muscle training accuracy, providing patients with immediate feedback. 3D

Virtual Reality (VR) Training: VR-based PFMT offers interactive training, engaging patients and improving adherence. Mindfulness-Based Pelvic Therapy: Incorporating mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing and body awareness, enhances relaxation and control of the pelvic floor, reducing involuntary muscle contractions and associated discomfort.

#### Conclusion

The rehabilitation of cystocele offers a multi-faceted, patient-centered approach that addresses both symptom management and the underlying muscular dysfunction. Pelvic floor muscle training, biofeedback, electrical stimulation, and lifestyle modifications comprise an effective, non-surgical pathway that can improve symptoms, delay the progression of prolapse, and enhance quality of life. Emerging technologies like ultrasound guidance and VR are showing promise in optimizing rehabilitation outcomes. As research progresses, integrating these advanced techniques with conventional therapies may provide increasingly effective, patient-specific rehabilitation solutions for cystocele management.

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