

Bladder control no laughing matter

By Wanda McConnell

At least once a week, Kelli Berzuk hears a woman say she laughed so hard she peed her pants.

"And then they turn to me and say: 'that's normal, right?'"

The answer, says Berzuk, is "no. And I have a big concern that women accept it as a normal part of aging or as a consequence of childbirth."

It's one reason why, after eight years as a physiotherapist specializing in incontinence and pelvic pain, Berzuk has written a book on the subject.

It's aptly titled *I Laughed So Hard I Peed My Pants! A*



Physiotherapist Kelli Berzuk says women shouldn't accept incontinence as a normal consequence of aging or childbirth.

Woman's Essential Guide for Improved Bladder Control.

Naming the book was one of the hardest decisions for the first-time author.

"I asked all my friends to rate the title because I was worried it would offend someone, but 100 per cent of them liked it," says Berzuk, 35.

The book explains the causes of incontinence and what women can do to prevent or reduce it.

"Small changes to diet and exercise can make significant improvements for most women," says Berzuk, who works in the Incontinence and Pelvic Pain Clinic, a division of the Nova Physiotherapy and Sports Fitness Clinic located in the Medical Arts Building.

Female incontinence is far from rare. The Mayo Clinic estimates that 50 per cent of women in the U.S. will experience the condition some time in their lives.

It frequently becomes a problem during pregnancy or after delivery, and following menopause.

What's surprising, says Berzuk, is that it is also common among young, athletic women who have never been pregnant. In one study, 28 per cent of 144 young female athletes involved in high impact sports suffered from incontinence.

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"Those statistics shocked me, too," says Berzuk. "Bladder control is really important to self-esteem, especially at that age. Your bladder shouldn't cause such problems."

Berzuk says she wrote the book to explain as fully as possible how to do exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that control the bladder.

"It's really important that they do the exercises correctly because if they don't they could damage the muscle further and increase their symptoms."

Berzuk, a busy mom who lives in Birds Hill with her husband and two young children, knows

women might cringe at the thought of trying to find time to do the exercises. However, these are exercises that, once learned, can be done while doing other activities, she says.

"I do mine while I'm flossing my teeth," she says, laughing. They can be done while talking on the phone, stopped at a red light, or watching television.

The important thing, Berzuk says, is that they be done correctly.

"I would be trying to explain them over the phone to a patient and it was really hard. That's when I started thinking about doing the book," she says, adding that because it's a hidden condition, there are not a lot of books available on

the subject. Berzuk says wearing a pad is appropriate in certain situations, but that it's "a licence to leak. It's not the answer. You have to work at the solution."

I Laughed So Hard I Peed My Pants is available at Chapters, Coles, and McNally Robinson Booksellers. It's also available through: www.iloughedsohard.com