

Let's laugh, not leak



Wetting ourselves and pelvic floor exercises are not a funny topic and it is an intimate issue but Elaine Miller is using comedy to change the world, one vagina at a time. Should you be listening to what yours is telling you?

The lighter side

Gusset Grippers is an evidence-based comedy show about pelvic floors written by a frank, funny and factual physiotherapist (and recovered incontinent) Elaine Miller. You may recognise her from BBC's Wake up to Menopause Week.

Reflecting on her sell-out run for her pelvic floor show last year Elaine says: "I'd like to think that's because I'm hilarious, but, really, people came in droves because they are desperate for the information."

Shockingly, one in three women and one in nine men wet themselves. It is common, never normal

and most people can be helped. "People think leaking is an inevitable consequence of ageing or parenthood, that's just not true" says Elaine.

Elaine's audience leaves knowing what a pelvic floor is, what it does, why having a good one is smashing, and where to take theirs if it is a bit wonky. "I use comedy to address the embarrassment of these most intimate of issues and that enables people to ask for help."

Funny old thing

Gusset Grippers gathers evidence on its audience. Elaine is working with Galway University researching project to establish if humour is an effective health promotion tool.

There is a public health purpose - leaking is linked to diseases of inactivity and hip fractures. The suspension of mesh surgery means it is imperative women know that vaginal prolapse can be managed with pelvic floor exercises. "The only side effect of seeing Gusset Grippers is an improved orgasm. People need to know that!" says Elaine.





Elaine is a founding member of Pelvic Roar – a physio-led pelvic health campaigning, and Sweet F Aye - a comedian led social enterprise aiming to deliver women's health to areas of social deprivation, geographical isolation or cultural diversity. She is working with MSPs on the Baby Box scheme and the Department of Health on their NHS 10 year plan. She has spoken on Women's Hour, the BBC and Mumsnet. She is a sought-after international speaker for professional conferences and has performed her show in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland.

Gusset Grippers teaches you things you didn't realise you needed to know. There are freebies, a prolapse chicken, a clitoris puppet and a grand finale with a 5'4" singing vulva.

Elaine's aim is to change the world, one vagina at a time.

The serious stuff

- Any involuntary loss of urine, faeces or gas is described as the complaint of incontinence.
- Incontinence has never been a public health



priority because it does not shorten lives. The secondary effects, however, just might. People who leak when they run don't tend to run and diseases of inactivity like diabetes and coronary heart disease are responsible for 1:6 premature deaths, which is more than smoking. Older people who hurry to the toilet at night are at risk of falls. 20% of people who break a hip will be dead within a year.

- People often feel shame or embarrassment about their incontinence - which prevents them from seeking help. That means leaking is a largely 'hidden condition' and so policy makers have been unaware of it's impact or costs.
- In 2012 Australia calculated the secondary costs of incontinence costs them \$42.9billion a year – that's not a typo! There are, as yet, no figures for what incontinence costs the UK public purse – that's not a joke.
- Prevalence of leaking increases with age. Incontinence is the second most common reason for a woman moving into residential care. 84% of stress incontinence can be cured in six physiotherapy sessions and good results are possible even decades after having a baby.
- Leaking in the first six weeks after having a baby doubles a woman's risk of postnatal depression and if a woman does not do something about it, she is likely to still be leaking when the baby is 12 and starts secondary school.
- Pelvic floor exercises and physiotherapy are front line treatment for vaginal prolapse, it is vital for women to know this since surgical options have changed with the suspension of mesh.
- Gusset Grippers is the subject of a research project between Elaine Miller and Galway University. There is no published evidence that humour is an effective health promotion tool, but there is anecdotal evidence that Gusset Grippers has resulted in help-seeking behaviour by its audience. Marketing has long since used humour and Elaine believes that comedy is an untapped resource in health communication.

www.gussetgrippers.co.uk