WOMEN’S HEALTH ISSUES:  
SEPARATING fact FROM fiction

Cindy Land, the pelvic health program coordinator at Lakeview Hospital, and Brenda Johnson, CNM, a certified nurse midwife at Amery Hospital & Clinic, put to rest some common myths about women’s pelvic and sexual health.

**MYTH:** Women should expect pelvic health issues such as bladder leakage and painful intercourse.

**Cindy:** Pelvic health problems aren’t something that you have to accept because you’re a woman. It’s not normal to have to go to the bathroom every 30 minutes or be able to hold it for eight hours.

**MYTH:** No one knows what I’m going through and it’s too embarrassing to talk about.

**Cindy:** One out of every four women experiences some kind of pelvic or sexual health issue in her life and many feel isolated. I promote the idea of women helping women. The best thing women can do for each other is be open and honest about their experiences. Sharing could really help someone who doesn’t know treatment is an option or the difference it can make.

**MYTH:** It’s something that happens as you age and you can’t reverse it.

**Cindy:** Pelvic health issues affect women of all ages. I think my youngest patient is 19 years old and my oldest is 95.

**MYTH:** Surgery is the only option for pelvic and sexual health issues.

**Cindy:** The days of let’s just do surgery or prescribe pills have passed. Exercises to help with pelvic muscle strengthening, awareness and relaxation can resolve many issues. Other options include: bladder retraining, managing fluids, making behavior changes and re-educating the pelvic muscle.

**Brenda:** For discomfort inserting a tampon, for example, could be resolved by changing the tampon size or type of applicator. For women experiencing vaginal dryness, perhaps while breastfeeding or after menopause, using lubrication for sex is important.

**MYTH:** If you’ve been through childbirth, you just have to expect issues.

**Brenda:** There’s no truth to the idea that vaginal deliveries cause pelvic-floor problems. Women who have never had children or who had a cesarean section, can have pelvic issues, too. After having a baby, women can experience some issues, such as a weaker pelvic-floor muscle or decrease in sex drive, which there’s often a solution.

**MYTH:** Pelvic-floor exercises don’t help at all; I’ve done them for years and haven’t made a difference.

**Brenda:** People often don’t do pelvic floor exercises (or kegels) correctly, don’t do them frequently enough or don’t hold them long enough to have an effect. Learn how to make that muscle work for you!

**Cindy:** Many people actually need help identifying the correct muscle to do pelvic-floor exercises. If you aren’t using the correct muscle, the exercises won’t do you any good and could even cause harm.