

## Book reviews

### Ending Female Pain: A Woman's Manual

By Isa Herrera

Duplex Publishing, New York, NY, 2009, 288 pages, paperback, US\$29.95 (available to buy via [www.renew-pt.com](http://www.renew-pt.com) or from online bookstores)

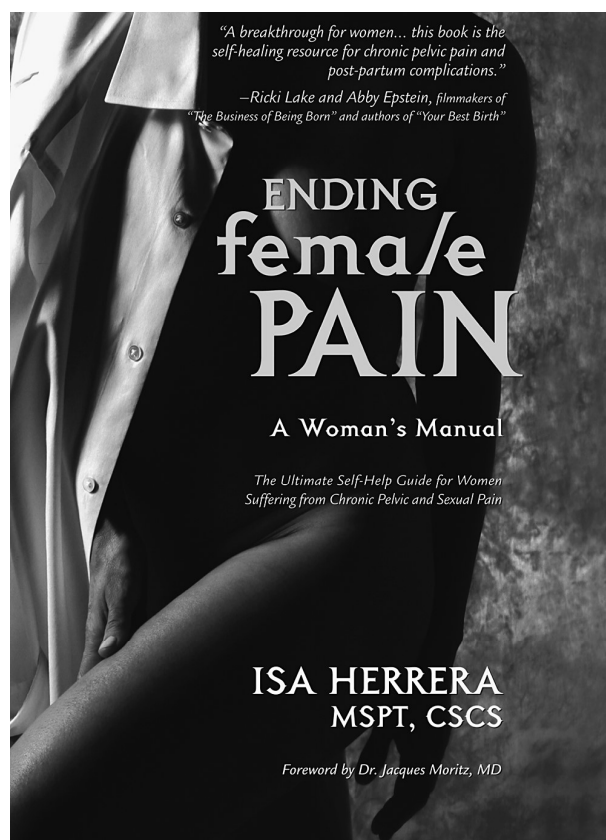
ISBN-13 978-1-439-25777-7

*Ending Female Pain: A Woman's Manual* is written by Isa Herrera, a physical therapist based in New York, NY, USA. Describing itself as *The Ultimate Self-Help Guide for Women Suffering from Chronic Pelvic and Sexual Pain*, the book begins with brief testimonies from patients and healthcare professionals, and a foreword by Dr Jacques Moritz, a gynaecologist who promotes the role of specialist physical therapy in the management of pelvic pain disorders.

The introductory chapter sets the very constructive tone by encouraging readers to have an open mind and emphasizing that positive thoughts are better than being overly dramatic. There is sensible advice on progress and setbacks, and reminders to individuals that they are in control. Chapter 2 describes how to use the book and suggests that it is read all the way through first. Herrera gives an overview of what follows and indicates the necessary time commitment – at least an hour a day – once readers start to follow her advice. She does advise women to have a medical check-up, either in order to exclude any underlying pathology or to be prescribed any appropriate adjunct treatments (e.g. medication). There are useful resources, such as a progress diary that can be copied from the text or downloaded from the author's website ([www.renew-pt.com](http://www.renew-pt.com)).

Chapter 3 describes the anatomy and physiology of the pelvic floor and various medical conditions. It concludes with comprehensive and systematic instructions on how to self-examine the area, although internal inspection is not addressed.

Chapters 4–8 deal with exercises and stretches for the relief of pelvic pain, beginning with eight techniques for 'reverse Kegels'. These are discussed in advance of Kegel/pelvic floor muscle (PFM) strengthening exercises because Herrera



argues that women with pelvic pain commonly have a degree of hypertonicity in the PFM group and that this should be addressed in the first instance. The exercise regime includes diaphragmatic breathing, and various positions are illustrated, some of which (e.g. prayer squat) might be difficult for women with limited mobility or medical comorbidities. This section also describes how to undertake a vaginal self-examination and what to feel as the muscles relax. Once muscle release has been achieved, a strengthening programme involving both slow and fast contractions is then introduced, and there is a reminder of the importance of relaxation.

The following chapters discuss the Herrera Pilates Ball Strengthening Routine for Pelvic Pain™ and the Herrera Yoga Series for Pelvic Pain™, a range of exercises and stretches. Each work-out is clearly illustrated with a photograph, and a description of what to do, what to watch out for, the benefits of the technique and, when appropriate, a recommended stretch to

undertake after the exercise. Once again, there are some positions that would not suit every woman, but most are achievable. Both chapters begin with guidance and overall considerations (e.g. paying attention to your body alignment and getting off the ball). There is a detailed section on diastasis recti abdominis that includes details of how to measure it, how to avoid making it worse and corrective exercises.

Chapter 7 includes advice on stretching at work, which is as well explained and illustrated as before, and the next section addresses myofascial massage and release techniques using a foam roller. Chapters 9–11 cover self-care techniques – internally, externally and for scars – which are all thoroughly described via text, diagrams and photographs.

The final section is described as a ‘pelvic pain tool box’, and Herrera addresses vulvar care, bathroom (i.e. toilet) habits and other procedures, such as tennis ball massage, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, strain-counterstrain, mind–body visualizations and life-strategy techniques. The book concludes with a comprehensive resource list, glossary and bibliography.

I found *Ending Female Pain* very readable: the language is clear, the text well spaced and the tone very positive. Some diagrams lack a little clarity or definition because of the greyscale presentation, but this is not a major concern. A lot of the content is based on the author’s extensive experience and she does use the term ‘in my opinion’, but I also recognized examples of evidence-based practice. There is good use of tables throughout to summarize important points, and I felt that all the techniques were systematically and comprehensively explained. I cannot speak on behalf of lay women, but as a women’s health physiotherapist, I felt that I understood what the author was saying and could follow her instructions. The chapters are interspersed with testimonies from women who suffer from pelvic pain, which give another, welcome perspective.

I think that Chapter 3 would have benefited from a description of vaginal self-examination and was surprised not to find it there since external examination of the vulvar area is covered very well. However, vaginal self-examination is introduced soon afterwards in relation to relaxing the PFM.

*Ending Female Pain* does not take the place of face-to-face assessment and treatment by a suitable physiotherapist/physical therapist, but that

is not the author’s intention. I believe that most women with pelvic pain would find something within the text that would help them to address their symptoms. I like the positive tone, and the balance of physical interventions and meditation/visualization. I would recommend this book to women’s health/pelvic floor physiotherapists as a professional resource that they might also suggest to their patients.

**Gill Brook**

*Physiotherapy Coordinator, Women’s Health  
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation  
Trust  
Bradford  
UK*

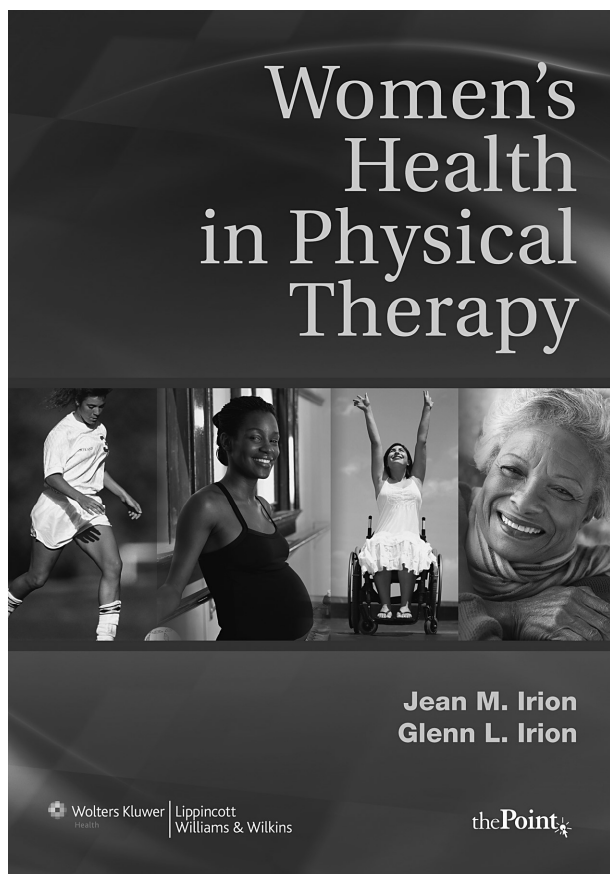
### **Women’s Health in Physical Therapy**

Edited by Jean M. Irion & Glenn L. Irion  
Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, MD,  
2009, 704 pages, paperback, US\$76.95 (available  
to buy from online bookstores)  
ISBN-13 978-0-781-74481-2

The preface to *Women’s Health in Physical Therapy* describes it as ‘the culmination of several years of finding and producing materials that represent the scope of physical therapy in the specialized practice of women’s health’. The book’s intended audience is varied, and includes physical therapy students, physical therapists in both general or specialist practice, and potential referrers such as physicians. It boasts a broad array of expert contributors from the USA, including Jill Boissonnault, former president and founder member of the International Organization of Physical Therapists in Women’s Health.

The text is presented in six parts that I shall consider in turn. These are further divided into chapters, all of which follow a similar format: objectives, introduction, boxed text that highlights issues, figures and tables, conclusion, and where appropriate, a case study.

‘Foundations in Women’s Health’ covers a mixture of topics, including the history of physical therapy within the specialty, and there is a long section on management and marketing that will be useful for anyone who wishes to establish a service. This is complemented by information on documentation and reimbursement, which might be of more relevance to private (particularly US-based) clinicians than to those working within the UK National Health Service. Part 1 also includes a chapter on patient education that has guidance on timely and appropriate women’s health information, and considers



issues such as literacy levels and cultural sensitivities, which are discussed further in a later chapter on psychosocial issues.

'Physical Therapy in Gynecologic Care' starts with a chapter on anatomy and physiology. This is followed by in-depth sections on physical therapy management of pelvic floor dysfunction, pelvic pain and chronic pelvic pain disorders, and before and after gynaecological surgery. Each subject is covered extensively and with an emphasis on the aspects that are of most relevance to the intended readership (e.g. assessment and management of urinary incontinence).

'Physical Therapy in Obstetric Care' includes chapters on: anatomy, physiology and musculoskeletal changes in the childbearing year; management of musculoskeletal dysfunction; physical activity and exercise; promotion of normal birth; physical therapy intervention during labour and delivery, and postnatally; and management of high-risk pregnancies. Once again, the subjects are covered in depth and appropriately illustrated with clear photographs.

As the name suggests, 'Medical and Musculoskeletal Lifespan Issues in Women's Health' includes chapters on adolescence, the middle years and beyond. Heart disease and osteoporosis are also covered in depth. A chapter on women in the workplace not only deals with posture and manual handling when 'out' at work, but also in the home, and includes advice on childcare (some of which might have been more appropriately placed within the earlier chapter on postnatal care).

'Oncologic Issues within Women's Health' focuses on breast cancer (including reconstructive surgery) and the management of lymphoedema.

Finally, 'Special Topics within Women's Health' includes chapters on the female athlete, exercise issues and ageing, aquatic therapy, and the management of women with long-term disabilities. Aquatic therapy, in particular, is covered very thoroughly, including the principles of exercise in water, indications for its use within women's health and examples of exercises.

*Women's Health in Physical Therapy* provides a wealth of information for its intended readership. The sensible use of sections, chapters and clear headings within the text guide the reader to topics of interest, and make this an easy text to navigate. The consistent layout of all the chapters also contributes to this. The book further benefits from the effective use of tables, figures, photographs and useful resources. The language – and general bias – is American, but this should not deter an international readership. Nevertheless, I did feel that there were a few omissions, particularly the menopause, which is of such relevance to women and their health. Furthermore, little consideration is given to gynaecological and other cancers, although breast cancer is comprehensively covered.

I would recommend *Women's Health in Physical Therapy* to women's health physical therapists/physiotherapists as a useful addition to their libraries, and I applaud the editors and chapter authors for their work.

**Gill Brook**

*Physiotherapy Coordinator, Women's Health  
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation  
Trust  
Bradford  
UK*