

Case Study: Empelvic Usability Evaluation – Postnatal Fitness Group

Project: Postnatal Fitness Group	Product/Service: Empelvic
Date: July 2024 – December 2024	Originator: Stephanie Dunne – UK Marketing Executive

Background:

A group of participants, with post-partum or weak pelvic floors which impacted their continence, were recruited to take part in an Empelvic evaluation project in the UK over a 16-week period.

The aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of Empelvic in improving pelvic floor health. The study included women with varying levels of pelvic floor dysfunction due to postnatal or age-related factors. Participants engaged in structured usage routines and shared their experiences through interviews and roundtable discussions at weeks 8 and 16. Participants were given an Empelvic cushion, an Instruction for Use (IFU) leaflet, a printed Progress Diary to complete daily, and links to online training videos were also provided. An online version of the progress diary was also available to participants, but they completed the printed version instead.

Empelvic is a non-invasive foam cushion designed to assist individuals in training their pelvic floor muscles. It helps users develop awareness and connection with their pelvic floor to enhance overall pelvic health. The Empelvic method uses the natural coordination between the pelvic floor and breathing. When sitting on the Empelvic cushion, users can better sense their pelvic floor muscles, promoting both strength and relaxation. This method supports improvement in various pelvic health conditions.

Sample size

7 female participants were recruited.

- 4 completed the full 16-week evaluation.
- 1 completed the 8-weeks to the round table and 16 week round table discussions
- 2 did not start the evaluation.

Key Themes and Participant Insights

Awareness and Education

- **Improved understanding:** Participants fed back that they gained a heightened awareness of their pelvic floor muscles and how to engage them effectively. This education often addressed gaps left by traditional advice, such as simply performing Kegel exercises without proper guidance.
- **Confidence in techniques:** The Empelvic cushion instructions for use were generally clear and participants found these useful in improving their ability to locate and activate their pelvic floor muscles.

Physical Improvements

- **Reduction in leakage:** Improvements were noted in bladder control. Participants reported experiencing reduced incidents of leakage during activities such as running, sneezing, or coughing.
- **Activity resumption:** The device enabled participants to regain confidence in physical activities previously avoided due to leakage concerns, such as running, boxing, and jumping.

Mental and Emotional Benefits

- **Empowerment:** Using Empelvic fostered a sense of ownership over pelvic health. Participants described feeling empowered by addressing an often-overlooked aspect of their well-being.
- **Improved mental health:** Increased physical confidence and control translated into reduced anxiety and improved overall mental health.

Challenges and Barriers

- **Consistency in use:** Regular use correlated with better outcomes, but some participants struggled with maintaining consistency due to busy schedules, life events, or lack of habit.
- **Hormonal impacts:** Fluctuations around menstruation posed temporary setbacks in progress for some users.
- **Ergonomic adjustments:** Suggestions included providing a firmer base for seating and clearer orientation markings on the device.

Feedback on the Empelvic Experience

Ease of Use

- Participants appreciated the portability and simplicity of the device. They generally found the provided instructions clear, though some suggested additional support materials, such as videos or live demonstrations.

Accountability and Support

- The structured trial process, including diaries and group discussions, provided motivation and accountability. Participants recommended adding features such as online forums or an app for future users.

Likelihood to Recommend

- Participants expressed high satisfaction, with ratings for recommending the product often at 4 or 5 out of 5. They highlighted the value of the device in improving physical and emotional well-being.

Key Metrics

- **Reduction in leakage:** Up to 100% improvement in specific scenarios, such as sneezing or coughing, was reported by some participants.
- **Frequency of use:** Consistent users noted improvements within 3-4 weeks of starting the program.

- **Confidence ratings:** Mental and physical confidence increased for nearly all participants.

Recommendations for Improvement

- **Design enhancements:** Consider offering firmer or adjustable bases for use on different seating surfaces and adding ergonomic orientation markers.
- **Supplementary resources:** Develop an app or online resource hub with instructional videos, user forums, and guided exercises.
- **Customisable options:** Explore offering the device in different colours or textures to increase user appeal.

Conclusion

The Empelvic evaluation demonstrated the device's significant potential to improve pelvic floor health and overall quality of life for users. Participants' testimonials underscore its effectiveness and the empowerment it brings through education, physical improvement, and emotional support. With minor adjustments and expanded resources, the Empelvic could become a pivotal tool for addressing pelvic health concerns globally.

Statements from Participants Round Table Discussions

Questions were put to the participants at the round table discussion meetings and these are their individual statements:

Have you seen changes in your condition since we last met?

"It brought a lot of good habits for me, being aware of my like anatomy.... but it made me a lot more self aware of my own body. And I think doing so has done like a world of good for me"
(KH, Post-natal Fitness Group - Midlands UK)

I have started to get back into proper exercise now, so doing things like combat classes and I've signed up to do Tough Mudder next year. Just feeling a bit more like I can do that a bit more. Yeah, like it's not going to be disastrous if I do.
(MT, Post-natal Fitness Group – Midlands UK)

What motivated you [to use Empelvic]?

"I think it started to get part of my normal everyday routine and I think once it was there, it then just becomes part of that, which is good really, I feel better for it"
(KH, Post-natal Fitness Group – Midlands UK)

How did these difficulties make you feel [referring to bladder leakage]?

"I like to run, but I was finding that as time and gravity took hold running was causing leakage. I used to be into running, but even like simply going out the door and doing like a couple of kilometres or 5K I stopped doing it to focus on repairing my pelvic floor and I did do my

exercises.... I would do boxing and I felt like that would make me leak as well. So certain exercises, certain activities were off the list to a certain extent.

I feel like I'm jumping the gun here, but I did run a 10K the other week after doing this [Empelvic] and I didn't leak”

Can I ask to what extent the [Empelvic] cushion reduced the frequency of your incontinence or leakage and by how much?

*“100% sneezing... definitely sneezing has totally stopped”
(AL, Post-natal Fitness Group, Midlands UK)*

What would your advice be to other people who are considering using the product?

*Be disciplined and don't expect overnight results. But you know, as long as you put time in then you'll get the result
(AL Post-natal Fitness Group, Midlands UK)*

Would you be able to summarise your experience on being in the Empelvic evaluation?

*“I would say being in this evaluation has helped me to learn about my body and breathing techniques and my pelvic floor. It's helped me recognise the importance of having that control and what it means to my day-to-day life. And that taking ownership of this aspect of my life has been a positive experience”
(VL, Post-natal Fitness Group, Midlands UK)*