

Levator ani syndrome

Dr Beth Shelly, PT, DPT, WCS, BCB-PMD

Symptoms make the diagnosis

There are no laboratory tests for this condition. Levator ani syndrome is a collection of symptoms and findings. Not all patients have all the symptoms. Only your doctor can diagnose levator ani syndrome. The most common symptoms include:

- Deep dull aching in the rectum/vagina
- Referred pain to the thigh and buttock
- Sensation of “sitting on a ball”
- Pain is worse in sitting and with bowel movement
- Spasms and pain in the pelvic floor muscle
- Pain during or after intercourse
- Tests usually show there is no inflammatory bowel disease, infection, ulcers or other bowel problem

What treatments can help?

- Medications to decrease muscle spasm and pain
- Biofeedback to learn how to relax and contract the pelvic muscles properly
- Electrical stimulation to the pelvic floor muscles to relax them and to increase circulation and promote healing
- TENS electrical stimulation to the pelvic floor nerves in the lower spine may help to “cover up” the pain and helps to relax the muscles
- Sometimes the pain is worse because of spasm in the buttock muscles or problems in the sacroiliac joint. Physical therapy can treat these areas.
- Heat and ultrasound to relax the pelvic floor muscles
- A special form of rectal and buttock massage can be performed by the physician or therapist to decrease pain and spasm.
- Learning how pain works and what you can do to help ([Why Pelvic Pain Hurts and Heal Pelvic Pain](#) are two of many books on the subject)

What can I do to help?

- Sitting posture is extremely important with levator ani syndrome. **Do not slouch !!!** Slouching puts pressure on the coccyx and increases spasm of the pelvic floor muscles. A special cushion may also be helpful. Do not sit on a donut as this increases the pressure on the tailbone.
- Avoid constipation. Do not strain to move your bowels.
- Sit in a warm tub or apply a warm towel to the vaginal or rectal area
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises with a focus on relaxation can help pump the muscle improving circulation.
- General exercise increases circulation to the pelvic area
- Relaxation and stress management can also help decrease pain

Coccygodynia – pain in the coccyx (tailbone)

The tailbone is a common area of referred pain. Careful evaluation should determine the cause of the tailbone pain. It is often not the bone or the joint. Levator ani syndrome may be present.

What can I do to help?

- Proper sitting posture is necessary for relief of tailbone pain
- You should shift your weight forward onto the thigh and “sit bones” away from the tailbone.
- A firm chair will put less pressure on the tailbone and support your posture better. Too hard will be more uncomfortable.
- A [special seat cushion \(Seat Solution\)](#) may help to decrease tailbone pain further.

Levator ani syndrome and coccygodynia are often complex and may require several health care providers. Specialized pelvic physical therapists can help patients with pelvic pain. Therapy may include specialized exercises, education, stretching of muscles and scars, and modalities for pain relief. Speak to your doctor about a referral to a specialized pelvic physical therapist.