

Self help for pelvic pain

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There are many structures that can cause pain in the pelvis. Some are fairly easy to identify; others may never be completely understood. It is important to have a good medical evaluation. Unfortunately, referred pain is common in the pelvis and causes much confusion. Referred pain can originate from organs, muscles, or joints. Referred pain is felt in a location other than the origin of pain. Phantom limb pain is a form of referred pain. Even though the foot has been amputated, the patient may “feel” the foot and may even feel like he can move it. Below is listed the most common pelvic pain syndromes.

❖ These diagnosis do not identify the problem, only the location of the pain.

Sciatica – pain in the buttock and back of the leg.

Coccygodynia – pain in the tailbone.

Dyspareunia – painful intercourse

❖ Complex syndromes of unknown origin

Interstitial cystitis – sever bladder pain.

Vulvodynia/ vestibulitis –pain in the vaginal opening.

Irritable bowel syndrome – alternating diarrhea and constipation as well as belly pain

Fibromyalgia – pain in many areas of the body.

❖ Other pelvic pain syndromes

Sacroiliac dysfunction – injury, malalignment, and laxity of the sacroiliac joint

Pubic symphysis strain – injury or laxity of the pubic symphysis joint

Levator ani syndrome – spasm of the pelvic floor muscle

Dysmenorrhea – painful monthly periods

Endometriosis – uterine cells are outside the uterus, results in pain and adhesions.

Adhesion – (abdomen and episiotomy) an adhesion is a connection between two structures that should be connected.

Pelvic pain can originate from a muscle spasm, joint dysfunction, scars and adhesions, poor posture, or organ dysfunction. When a muscle is in spasm, it is contracting on its own. This decreases the oxygen to the muscle and causes pain. Muscle spasms also pull on bones and joints and can cause them to hurt. Buttock, belly, hip and pelvic floor muscles can be in spasm. Muscle spasms often feel tight and hard and may have trigger points (very sensitive areas).

Joints are meant to fit together in a certain way, like puzzle pieces. When they don't fit together correctly, the bones can pinch and wear down causing pain at the joint or referred pain. Skin, muscles, and organs are meant to slide smoothly over the structures around them. This sliding allows us to move without pain. If the structure does not slide it can cause pain or pull on the joints. Adhesions can also change the way organs work and cause various symptoms.

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Slouching, standing on one leg, and lifting improperly can cause stress on joints and muscles. Cramping in organs can also cause pain. Sometimes treatment is directed at decreasing the organ cramping or pain. Other problems that might occur because of the organ pain may include: poor posture, adhesions, and muscle spasms.

Whatever the cause of pain, it is important to remain active and participate fully in your recovery. Treatments only work if you follow the directions of your health care provider, take the medications as prescribed and attend all scheduled appointments. In general, it is important to do as much as possible at home and work as you are able. This may mean pushing the limit a little. If your activity level does not increase your pain then it is usually ok. Check with your doctor or therapist if you have questions. Balance is the key. Do not do anything that causes severe increase in symptoms and do not spend all day slouching on the couch. Rest is sometimes necessary however too much inactivity can cause weakness which can contribute to the pain instead of helping. Social isolation also can contribute to depression which can make you “feel” worse.

Your thoughts can make you feel worse or better. For example when you feel bad and have pain you may slouch more, avoid going out with friends or doing anything that is not absolutely necessary. Sitting around on the couch will only result in more weakness and pain. When you are up beat, you are more likely to exercising more often, sitting and standing taller, and doing more activities. The end result is faster progress in rehabilitation. Get involved with activities you enjoy and keep yourself socially active. Learning more about how pain works and how you can change also helps. [Why Pelvic Pain Hurts and Heal Pelvic Pain](#) are two of many books on the subject.

Heat is used to increase circulation, relax muscles and provide pain relief. It often provides temporary relief; however, if it is combined with other activities (exercise, stretching, massage) it plays an important role in recovery. There are several ways to provide warmth to the pelvis: warm bath, warm compress (wet a hand towel in hot water, wring it out and place it on the painful area), heating pad, rice bag (fill an athletic sock with raw rice. Tie the end of the sock and microwave for 30 sec on each side). CAUTION: Test the temperature of the hot towel or the rice bag before placing it on the skin. Be careful not to burn the skin. Twenty minutes is usually enough to help the muscles relax and decrease pain.

Pelvic pain is 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.