

## Pelvic Pain Awareness

To bring a greater awareness to this widespread medical problem, May has been designated “Pelvic Pain Awareness Month” by the International Pelvic Pain Society.



Pelvic Pain is often called ‘the silent epidemic’...

It affects about 20% of women and about 8% of men at some time in their life. Information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that chronic Pelvic Pain is more common than asthma (about 14%) and back pain (10%).

But despite the number of people experiencing this often-debilitating illness, it’s a condition that’s rarely discussed.

And because most types of pelvic pain are not easily diagnosed with blood tests or scans, it’s easy for women and men with this problem to suffer pain for years before finding the help they need.

Some causes of chronic pelvic pain in women include:

- *Endometriosis*
- *Musculoskeletal problem*
- *Chronic pelvic inflammatory disease*
- *Ovarian remnant Fibroids*
- *Painful bladder syndrome (interstitial cystitis)*
- *Irritable bowel syndrome*
- *Pelvic congestion syndrome*
- *Cancer and Cancer related treatments*
- *Psychological factors*

In men, pelvic pain can involve the bladder, bowel, pelvic muscles and the prostate, resulting in pelvic pain due to:

- *Acute and chronic bacterial prostatitis*
- *Chronic pelvic pain syndrome*
- *Asymptomatic inflammatory prostatitis*

How do you know if you have pelvic pain?

Well...as the old saying goes...if you have it you will know it!

Those with pelvic pain may experience:

- *Pain when sitting, often in the tailbone or coccyx, the bottom, pubic area or lower back*
- *Pressure or throbbing in the pelvis, rectum or genitals*
- *Burning pain in the scrotum, penis or crotch*
- *Bowel problems*
- *Bladder problems, such as the frequency, slow passage of urine, or bladder pain*
- *Sexual pain during intercourse or orgasm*

### **Pelvic pain and Sex...these two just don't go together**

If you have a pattern of pelvic pain, and you think about having sex, your mind will be pre-loaded with worry about pain.

The cycle of persistent pelvic pain associated with sexual activity can result in what I call 'Sexual anticipated anxiety'. We call this the 'psycho-sexual' aspect of pain:

Sexual activity with pain is of course, just not pleasurable; this creates worry, which leads to increased pain. This in turn, results in problems interfering with sex such as vaginal lubrication and elongation in women, and erectile dysfunction in men, and of course fewer erotic thoughts, all of which are important to enhance sexual pleasure

Without awareness and intervention, the 'psycho-sexual' aspect of pain is likely to lead to a worry-pain cycle or pattern, resulting in a negative attitude toward sex, and avoidant behaviours within relationships.

This may then lead to a decline in sexual self-esteem and mood, resulting in a ripple effect to the partner, further exacerbating the pain experience.

While chronic pelvic pain is unlikely to 'go away', there are ways to help you manage the impact of this in your life:

First, if you are experiencing pelvic pain I encourage you to consult your doctor to learn more about your pain and discuss possible treatments such as medication, or a referral to a physiotherapist.

A referral to a Clinical Sexologist might also be appropriate if you are experiencing associated sexual problems, while a referral to a Counsellor might be beneficial if you're feeling anxious or depressed.

Keeping as active and healthy as you can, and involved in activities you enjoy, will also be of help.

And finally, although it might be challenging at times, it is important to try and maintain a positive outlook on life.

Visit the Pelvic Pain Foundation for further information:

[www.pelvicpain.org.au](http://www.pelvicpain.org.au)

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