

Women's Health Week – “Pain Drain” info sheet

Pelvic drain

Pelvic pain is pain felt in the area below your belly button and between your hips. Your bowel, bladder, uterus, and pelvic floor are located here, as well as other muscles and joints. Pelvic pain can originate from any of these locations.

Pelvic pain can be described as acute, that is short-term lasting a few days or chronic, this is persistent pelvic pain or felt most days and lasts for more than 6 months.

Common causes of pelvic pain include:

- Period pain
- Pelvic floor dysfunction
- Endometriosis
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Bowel and bladder problems.

Causes of pelvic pain can vary, but there is help available. Chat to your GP if you are struggling with pelvic pain.

Period Pain (dysmenorrhoea)

As per the Jean Hailes foundation, 93% of menstruating adolescents are affected by period pain. Period pain can continue well after adolescent years.

This may include pain in your pelvic area, lower back, or stomach. If your pain last more than the first one or two days of your period, or impacts your ability to perform daily tasks, speak to your doctor.

Management of period pain

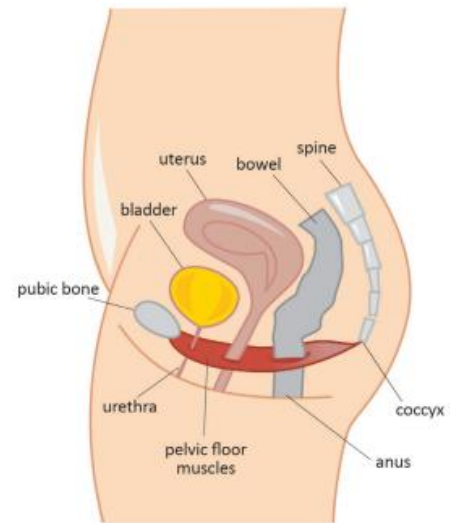
- Heat - this helps relax the muscles of the uterus and pelvis
- Exercise - releases endorphins, these are our natural feel-good hormones and pain relievers.
- Relax - enjoy a warm bath, meditate, participate in activities that make you feel good.
- Pain relief - ibuprofen, naproxen, or diclofenac as per packet instructions. Take medication when pain begins and continue regularly during the days you experience period pain.
- Hormone contraception - to stop ovulation and menstruation. Chat to your doctor about this option.

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Pelvic floor dysfunction

The pelvic floor is a sling of muscles that extend from the pubic bone to the tail bone. It supports the bladder, uterus, vagina, and bowel. These muscles play an important role in bladder and bowel control and sexual function.

Pelvic floor dysfunction occurs when these muscles are either too tight, too weak or stretched out. Common causes for pelvic floor dysfunction include after pregnancy and childbirth, menopause, heavy lifting, and injury to the pelvic area.



Symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction include:

- Issues passing urine (leaking, incomplete emptying, urgency, and frequency)
- Issues with emptying bowels (incontinence, constipation, urgency)
- Vaginal prolapse (a bulge in the vagina, feeling of heaviness or dropping)
- Painful sex
- Pelvic pain

If you are experiencing the symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunction, chat to a health care professional. This may include:

- Doctor
- Women's Health Nurse
- Pelvic Health Physiotherapist
- Continence Nurse

<https://www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au/pages/pelvic-floor-muscle-exercises-for-women.html>

Sexually transmitted infections (STI's)

STI's can be a cause of pelvic pain. When seeing your doctor for pelvic pain, an STI test may be suggested.

STI's are transmitted through body fluids during sexual contact, this may include vaginal fluids, semen (cum) or fluids from the anus. These body fluids can be shared during both oral and penetrative sex.

STI's are common, it is estimated 1 in 6 Australians will be diagnosed with an STI in their lifetime. Most are easily treated. If left undiagnosed and untreated, STI's can cause damage to the urinary and reproductive tract. This can impact your ability to pass urine, fall pregnant and cause chronic pelvic pain.

Symptoms include:

- Sores or bumps around the vulva, vagina or anus
- Pain or burning when doing a wee
- Smelly discharge from the vagina – yellow or grey
- Vaginal bleeding in between your period
- New pain during sexual penetration of the vagina
- Pelvic pain

45-60% of STI's have no symptoms, because of this, regular 6 – 12 monthly asymptomatic testing is recommended if you are sexually active.

An STI test can include:

- Urine sample
- Blood test

<https://shvic.org.au/stis-and-bbvs>

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Painful sex

Pain with sex (dyspareunia) can be experienced by sexually active women or all ages. It can be described as pain felt before, during or after vaginal intercourse. It is estimated to be experienced by 3-18% of women globally. Painful sex is a common experience for women but is not normal. Seek help, there are local health professionals ready to support you.

Types of painful sex

- Superficial dyspareunia – pain with penetration
- Deep dyspareunia – pain felt at the top of the vagina or pelvis

Common causes

- Insufficient lubricant/arousal
- Inflammation or infection
- Pelvic floor muscle dysfunction

First step in achieving pain free sex is discussing your experience with a trusted health care professional. This could be a; General Practitioner, Women's Health Nurse, Pelvic floor physiotherapist or Continence Nurse

Lack of lubrication

In preparation for sexual penetration, when aroused the vagina and glands around the vaginal entrance will secrete fluids to provide lubrication.

Lack of lubrication causes include.

Changes to hormones - after childbirth, breastfeeding, and menopause

Lack of arousal - can be contributed to psychological factors, life stressors and certain medication.

What can you do about it?

- Personal lubricant
- Hormone replacement therapy for hormone causes
- Talk to your health care professional (GP, Women's Health Nurse, Pelvic Floor Physio, Continence Nurse)

Thank you for growing your knowledge about women's health with us this week. If you require further information, please contact our Women's Health Nurse on 5551 18455