

# **Patient Resource: Pelvic Pain**

## **What is Chronic Pelvic Pain?**

Chronic pelvic pain is pain that you have had in your pelvis for more than six months. The pain may be there all the time or it might come and go. Chronic pelvic pain can disrupt work, physical activity, sexual relations, toileting habits, sleep, or family life. It also can affect mental and physical health.

## **How common is it?**

An estimated 15–20% of women aged 18–50 years have chronic pelvic pain that has lasted for more than 1 year.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms for pelvic pain vary from patient to patient. They include feelings of a deep ache, burning, stinging, cramp or spasm in the structures within the pelvic, genital or lower back region. This may be accompanied by frequent urination, urgency, diarrhoea or constipation. You may also experience pain with sexual intercourse, during menstruation or at times when you are feeling stressed or anxious.

## **How did I get it?**

Chronic pelvic pain can be caused by a variety of conditions. It may originate from a problem with the reproductive organs, bladder, bowel, nerves or pelvic muscles. For some people, a cause is never found.

Not finding a cause does not mean that the pain is not real. Experts agree that it is not always possible to pinpoint a specific cause. For these cases, treatment is directed at pain relief.

There also appears to be a link between chronic pelvic pain and sexual or physical abuse. About one half of all women with chronic pelvic pain have a history of abuse. The reason for this connection is not clear. Depression also appears to be a complicating factor.

## **How can I fix it?**

A review with your doctor is a good place to start. They will ask you specific questions, conduct an examination and organise some tests to try and find the cause of the pain. It may also be necessary to see other specialists (eg gynaecologist, urologist, women's health physiotherapist) who can further investigate the problem.

## **How can physiotherapy help?**

Sometimes pelvic pain is caused by muscles in the pelvic region not working properly. A Women's Health Physiotherapist is specially trained to examine these muscles.

If a problem with the muscles is found, the physiotherapist can treat them using myofascial techniques that work on trigger points, helping to relax them. They will also teach you correct posture and how to re-train the muscles that aren't working well. Education on lifestyle changes and stress management will also be given to help manage the pain and prevent it from coming back.

### **What else can I do?**

Pain can be influenced by physical, social and psychological factors. An appointment with a psychologist and/or pain specialist may be helpful in identifying things in your life that could be adding to your experience of pain. They can teach you about pain mechanisms and work with you to find better ways to manage your pain.

**This resource is supplied by Proactive Physiotherapy. For further information or to book an appointment with a Women's Health Physiotherapist, please call 4053 6222.**