

Decoding Pelvic Pain

Have you ever felt a sensation in your stomach, a sharp pull in your lower abdomen, or stomach cramps? Do you assume the pain is triggered by gas pockets, or perhaps a pulled muscle -- and will resolve itself over time? Yet, did you ever consider that the underlying cause may be pelvic pain?

Pelvic pain is more common than you would think and has implications for your health. As a first step, you should pinpoint the source of the pelvic pain to determine which medical specialist you should consult. If the origin of the pain is gynecological, the pain may stem from benign conditions -- or may be more serious, requiring immediate medical attention.

What is Gynecological Pelvic Pain?

By definition, pelvic pain occurs in the lowest part of your abdomen and originates lower than your pubic bone. In women, pelvic pain may refer to symptoms arising from the reproductive or urinary systems or from musculoskeletal sources. Depending on its source, pelvic pain may be dull or sharp, constant or intermittent. It may be mild, moderate or severe. Pelvic pain can sometimes radiate to your lower back, buttocks or thighs and can occur in sudden, sharp bursts, and be acute or chronic. At times, pelvic pain (mild or severe) may be experienced when urinating or during sexual activity. If you suddenly develop severe pelvic pain, you may need immediate medical attention. Resist the temptation to self-diagnose and to assume that you're suffering from menstrual cramps or a urinary tract infection, or another benign condition.

What Are the Underlying Causes of GYN Pelvic Pain?

Pelvic pain arising from the female reproductive system is extremely common and may be caused by these conditions:

- Pregnancy, Ectopic Pregnancy or Miscarriage
- Ovarian Cysts or Ovulation Pain
- Menstrual Cramps or Endometriosis
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Uterine Fibroids
- Ovarian Cancer

In order to arrive at a final diagnosis of your pelvic pain, your gynecologist will conduct a detailed interview on all aspects of your pain, inquire about your personal health history as well as that of your family, and may ask you to keep a journal of your symptoms.

Possible tests or exams that may be ordered include:

- **Pelvic exam.** This can reveal signs of infection, abnormal growths or tense pelvic floor muscles.
- **Cultures.** Lab analysis for infections, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea.
- **Ultrasound.** This test uses sound waves to produce precise images of the ovaries, uterus and cervix within the pelvis.
- **Other imaging tests.** CT scans or MRI help detect abnormal structures or growths within the pelvis.
- **Laparoscopy.** A surgical procedure using a laparoscope that allows viewing your pelvic organs.

Finding the underlying cause of pelvic pain is a process, but in most cases, a clear explanation can be found. If you are experiencing pelvic pain and it is affecting your daily life, you should always seek the professional advice and expertise of an OB/GYN physician and take the right path to determining the cause of your symptoms.

It cannot be emphasized enough. If you have pelvic pain, be sure it's checked by an OB/GYN. As with any medical condition, early detection is important.

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