

The Importance of Women's Pelvic Health

Why is your pelvis important?

Your pelvis is a very important and complicated part your body. You might not know all that your pelvis does for you. The organs and tissues in the pelvis help you all through the day and the night with things like:

- Digesting food and passing bowel movements
- Making, holding, and passing urine
- Standing, walking, balancing on one leg, walking upstairs
- Sexual function
- Menstruation
- Pregnancy

What can go wrong in the pelvis

One of the most common health problems women seek help for is pain in the pelvis. At some point in their lives, 25 percent of women (1 in 4) may develop pain in the pelvis that lasts longer than 3 months. The pelvis is a complex part of your body. When something goes wrong it can be confusing both for you and your care provider. It may take some time to figure out why you're not feeling well.

Pain in the pelvis can come from any of the organs, muscles, or nerves in the pelvis. This includes the intestines, kidneys, ureters (tubes that connect the kidneys to the bladder), bladder, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, peritoneum (lining of the pelvis), pelvic floor, and pelvic girdle muscles. Pelvic pain may also be related to low back pain or problems with the muscles or joints in your legs.

You may experience problems with urination such as difficulty passing urine or difficulty holding urine (incontinence). You may also struggle with constipation, loose stools, or pain when passing a bowel movement.

You may also suffer from painful or heavy menstruation that is not relieved by common over the counter remedies. You may suffer from pain with sex. This may start from the first time you have sex or develop over time. Sometimes this problem, known as dyspareunia, may begin after childbirth or other pelvic surgery. It also may seem to come "out of the blue." Pain with sex is not normal. If you experience this pain, discuss it with your provider. There are many possible causes. A thorough exam may take time and several visits to the doctor.

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What if the pain doesn't get better?

Seek help from your care provider as early as you can. A new pain that comes on suddenly in the pelvis may be a sign of infection, inflammation, or injury. A pain that persists, even after the problem has been treated or when a cause could not be found, also needs attention. The pain you feel is real and can affect your life. Pain that lasts for a long time, known as chronic pelvic pain, can affect your relationships and how you feel about yourself. It is important to address not only the pain that you are feeling but how it impacts your life and you as a person. How can I help my doctor help me find out what is wrong?

It is important to tell your provider as much as you can about all the symptoms you have. For example, keep a log of the following:

- When your pain started and how long you have had it
- How often your pain occurs, what it feels like, and where exactly you feel it
- Any activity that seems to make the pain better or worse
- Things you have already tried to help the pain
- Changes in your bowel movements (i.e., diarrhea, constipation, or blood)
- Whether or not passing a bowel movement makes the pain worse or better
- Any changes in how frequently you urinate and the amount of urine when you go
- Whether or not you have started to have to get up at night to go to the bathroom
- Any blood in your urine, pain with urination, loss of urine, or the feeling that you have not completely emptied your bladder after you finish
- Whether sex makes your pain worse, if you are sexually active
- If you have trouble sleeping
- Changes in your mood or your relationship with loved ones

Remember, it may take several visits to identify all of the possible causes of your pain. Your care provider may recommend an approach that includes working with specialists that have expertise in each of these areas. Teamwork among your healthcare team as well as between you and your providers is key to success.

Who do I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions call the clinic at 970.625.1100.

Special instructions: _____

