

What is Pelvic Pain?

Pelvic pain for men is a term that relates to a pain problem in structures related to the pelvis including the **lower abdomen, bladder, bowel, penis or testicles, coccyx or tailbone**. Pain may start as a result of an injury or come on gradually. Men with pelvic pain may experience more than one pelvic pain condition at one time. It can be associated with bladder and bowel problems and sexual pain during intercourse or orgasm. Urinary symptoms such as urgency to get to the toilet, going to the toilet more often, pain with bladder filling or with urinating may coexist. Similarly, pain may be aggravated with a full bowel or opening the bowels. Some terms that are commonly used are chronic prostatitis (although it may have nothing to do with the prostate), chronic pelvic pain syndrome (CPPS), or pudendal neuralgia, if there is more nerve irritation.

Approximately 5% of men experience **pelvic pain** at some stage in their life. Persistent pain can be very distressing, exhausting, and disrupt many important aspects of a person's life.

What Causes it?

Pelvic floor muscle tension and difficulty **relaxing** the pelvic floor muscles is found in up to 80% of individuals with persistent pelvic pain, and most people are not conscious of this occurring. Muscles that are constantly clenched become tight and shortened, have reduced blood flow and oxygen, and eventually become painful. Over time this can result in increased sensitivity of the pelvic organs and other structures in and around the pelvis.

Although pelvic floor tension is a very common finding, it is important to understand that pelvic pain is multifactorial. It can be exacerbated by or associated with emotional and physical stress, low mood, poor sleep, fatigue, poor exercise habits, prostate, bowel, bladder and urinary tract problems and in some cases a history of trauma.

How Can Physiotherapy Help Pelvic Pain?

Research shows that physiotherapy management strategies to restore normal function of the muscles around the abdomen, hips and the pelvic floor can help to reduce pain.

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy for pelvic pain will often involve:

- A thorough history taking of your pain, screening for factors that could be influencing your problem and establishing your goals for treatment
- A comprehensive assessment of the muscles around the lower abdomen, hips, lower back and pelvis
- Choice of the use of real time ultrasound or internal rectal examination to accurately assess your pelvic floor and provide feedback on how to correctly perform exercises
- Exercises to help you to learn how to relax your pelvic floor and abdomen, often referred to as "down-training"
- Development of a toolbox of management strategies to address any contributing problems including:
 - Bladder and bowel habit retraining
 - Coaching the body in relaxation

- Breathing techniques
- Graded exposure to activity
- Sleep rehabilitation

A long-term plan is the key to managing your pain and it may take up to 3-6 months to make this plan work. We may also work in conjunction with your doctor, clinical psychologist, sexual therapist or other care providers if a more multifactorial approach is required.

Additional Resources

The pelvic pain foundation is a not-for-profit that helps to improve the quality of life of people with pelvic pain. Find out more here: <https://www.pelvicpain.org.au/>