



Managing persistent pelvic pain

An effective way to manage persistent (chronic) pelvic pain (PPP) is to work with a healthcare team. There are many things you can do to manage your persistent or chronic pelvic pain. In addition to your treatment plan, you can try practical strategies.

Learn about pain

Learn about pain, for example, where it comes from, what makes it better or worse and how it affects you physically and emotionally. This will help you take control and try different things to reduce your pain.

Stay active

Physical activity is an important part of staying healthy. Swimming, walking and mind-body practices like stretching and yoga can help you manage your pelvic pain. Your healthcare team can develop a physical activity plan that's right for you.

Pace yourself

Pacing means doing enough physical activity to improve your pain without causing a pain flare. It's a fine balance – and it may take time to learn your limits – but this approach will help you manage your energy and pain levels in the long term. A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can help you learn to pace yourself.

Eat well

The food you eat may influence your persistent pelvic pain. Research suggests an anti-inflammatory diet can help reduce persistent pain levels.

Try to eat more: fish; lean meat; eggs; vegetables; fruit; potatoes; raw nuts and seeds; coffee and tea; extra virgin olive oil.

Try to eat less: refined sugars; red meat; processed meats; processed foods like biscuits and cakes; food preservatives; fatty acids (found in some oils).

You will also benefit from limiting your alcohol intake and drinking more water.

A dietitian can help you develop a plan, especially if you have an underlying condition such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or painful bladder syndrome.

Good bowel habits

Good bowel habits are important if you have persistent pelvic pain, especially if you have IBS. You can try:

- eating foods high in fibre
- eating breakfast
- drinking plenty of water
- doing regular physical activity
- not straining or rushing when doing a poo.

Look after your emotional wellbeing

Persistent pelvic pain can affect your emotional wellbeing. It can cause stress, anxiety, depression, problems with sleep, sexual dysfunction and strained relationships. Stress can make your pain worse, so it's important to try different strategies to look after your emotional health – with help from a counsellor or psychologist if needed.

Sleep

It can be hard to get a good night's sleep when you have persistent pelvic pain, but there are practical things you can do to improve your sleep and quality of life. For example:

- cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) – your doctor, psychologist or sleep specialist can give you more information
- relaxation strategies
- good sleep habits
- melatonin supplements (talk to your doctor first).

Relationships

Persistent pelvic pain can make you feel emotionally drained and withdrawn. It's important to seek support from people close to you. It can be helpful to talk to your friends or family about your pain, and find ways to connect that work for you.

Practical ways to manage your pain

There are many practical things you can do to help manage your pain. For example, try:

- heat packs
- massage therapy
- breathing exercises
- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).

When to see your doctor

If you have persistent pelvic pain, it's important to see your doctor. It can take some time to diagnose persistent pelvic pain. It might also take time to learn how to manage it, with help from your healthcare team.

For more information, resources and references visit jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/persistent-pelvic-pain