

# Chronic pelvic pain

- One in six women are affected by chronic pelvic pain.
- Self-refer to 'AHP Suffolk' for specialist pelvic health physiotherapists.
- Pain is unique for everyone.

Chronic pelvic pain (CPP) is pain felt anywhere within the lower abdomen or pelvis that lasts more than 6 months. Around 6-27% of women are affected by CPP. Persistent and chronic pain is experienced differently for everyone and can be affected by physical, psychological and social factors. Women living with pelvic pain may also experience difficulties with their bladder or bowel. It can affect quality of life and your ability to carry out everyday activities which can be very distressing.

This includes:

- Bladder changes
- Financial impact
- Fatigue
- Bowel changes
- Poor sleep
- Mental health
- Social impact
- Loneliness
- Painful sex
- Medication side effects.

Sometimes healthcare professionals find a reason for CPP but for many women a clear cause is not found. For those living in pain, this can be frustrating.

It is understood that chronic pain is caused by many different factors which is why the whole-person approach is recommended for managing CPP.

These factors may include:

- Endometriosis
- Adhesions
- Fibroids

- Adenomyosis
- Non-gynae causes
- Ovarian cysts
- Cancer
- Chronic PID
- Pelvic organ prolapse.

Your healthcare professionals may use pharmaceutical treatment as part of your management, for example, hormonal therapy, non-hormonal medications like tranexamic acid, and/or different pain relief. There are also plenty of non-pharmaceutical pain management strategies which can be very effective.

When preparing for a clinic appointment, it can help to think about the questions you want to ask. **Shared-decision making** means you and your healthcare team work together to agree the best plan for you.

The Ask 3 Questions approach can support this:

1. **What are my choices?**
2. **What are the pros and cons of each option for me?**
3. **How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?**

## Non-pharmaceutical pain management strategies:

|                            |                          |                         |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Use of heat                | Pelvic Health Physio     | TENS machine            |
| Mindfulness and meditation | Exercise and stretches   | Lifestyle changes       |
| Psychological therapies    | Vitamins and supplements | Complementary therapies |
| Sleep                      | Positive self-talk       | Managing setbacks       |

## Top tips:

- Gentle exercise can be helpful with releasing muscle tension. Try the '*happy baby pose*' or a short night-time routine on YouTube from '*Yoga with Adriene*'.
- Pelvic Health Physios provide specialist advice for people with problems relating to pelvic floor, bladder, bowel and pelvic area. They provide assessment, advice and tailored treatment to help improve symptoms, reduce discomfort, restore pelvic floor function and supports people returning to everyday activities. You can self-refer for this service by searching 'AHP Suffolk' online.
- '*Headspace*' have partnered with Netflix and released videos with a guide to mindfulness, meditation and better sleep.
- Making some lifestyle changes can improve your general health, not just improve pain. Your GP might be able to help you with weight management and smoking cessation support.
- Reducing alcohol and caffeine in your diet could also improve bladder discomfort.
- Magnesium plays a crucial role in pain modulation and nervous system function. Taking daily magnesium supplements can act as a muscle relaxant. They can be bought over the counter.
- Omega-3 fats help to reduce inflammation and support a healthy immune system, which can reduce pain. You can get this through certain foods or as a supplement you buy over the counter.
- Consider professional support, such as therapists or counsellors, to help support your emotional wellbeing (links can be found below).
- Complementary therapies could include: acupuncture, massage, reflexology, aromatherapy or an osteopath.
- Try to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Use affirmations like "I am capable of managing pain". You could keep a diary of all your achievements, no matter how small they might seem, for example "today I made myself dinner".
- The '*Insight Timer*' app has lots of videos to guide you through different tools to relaxation, including: breathwork, meditation and mindfulness. You can also mix

together your own soothing sound track; calming music provides several therapeutic benefits for chronic pain.

- Setbacks and flare ups are bound to happen, don't panic! Identifying triggers and understanding setbacks can be useful when making a plan to manage them. The 'Live Well with Pain' website has a [Ten Footsteps programme](#) which can help.

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## **Professional emotional support:**

[Suffolk- Wellbeing Support](#)

[Norfolk- Wellbeing support](#)

[Suffolk Mind](#)

## **Local support groups:**

- [Bury St Edmunds- Chronic pain support group](#)
- [Ipswich- Womens Health Hope](#)
- [Norwich- Endometriosis](#)
- [Colchester- Endometriosis](#)
- [Suffolk- Online workshops](#)

## **Online resources:**

- [Gynae Info Hub](#)
- [Endometriosis UK](#)
- [The Pelvic Pain Network](#)
- [Wellbeing of Women](#)
- [Live Well with Pain](#)
- [Ten Footsteps programme](#)
- [Pain and symptom diary](#)
- [Menstrual Health Project](#)

- The Endometriosis Foundation
- RCOG- Long-term pelvic pain
- Pelvic health videos from AHP
- Suffolk
- Adenomyosis

## Gynae info hub

Information and resources to support your gynaecological health - scan the QR code or go to [wsh.nhs.uk/gynaeinfohub](https://wsh.nhs.uk/gynaeinfohub)



## Accessibility

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