

Musculoskeletal Pelvic Pain

People can have pain in their pelvis for many reasons. The type, location, and severity of pain vary from person to person. This handout talks about pain that comes from the muscles in the pelvis and reviews ways in which pain can be treated.

Conditions That Cause Musculoskeletal Pelvic Pain

The terms pelvic floor myalgia and myofascial pain syndrome describe painful muscles and ligaments of the pelvis. Terms like muscular spasm, high tone pelvic floor dysfunction, and overactive pelvic muscles refer to conditions where the pelvic floor muscles become too tight and cannot relax properly. Sometimes this tightness can cause difficulty in emptying your bladder, difficulty with having bowel movements, or pain with sex.

LEARN THE TERMS

Pelvis: Bones of your hips, buttocks, and pubic region.

Pelvic floor: Muscles of the pelvis that give support to your internal organs.

Myalgia: Muscle aches and pain.

Vulva: Area between the legs, outside of your vagina.

Vulvodynia: Stinging or burning pain of the vulva.

Myofascial: Muscles, ligaments and the tissue that surrounds them.

Inflammation: The body's natural response to injury, which can be felt as pain or swelling, can appear as skin redness, and can change how the muscle or organ works.

Where in the pelvis can pain happen?

Pain can occur at the opening of the vagina or can occur further into the vagina.

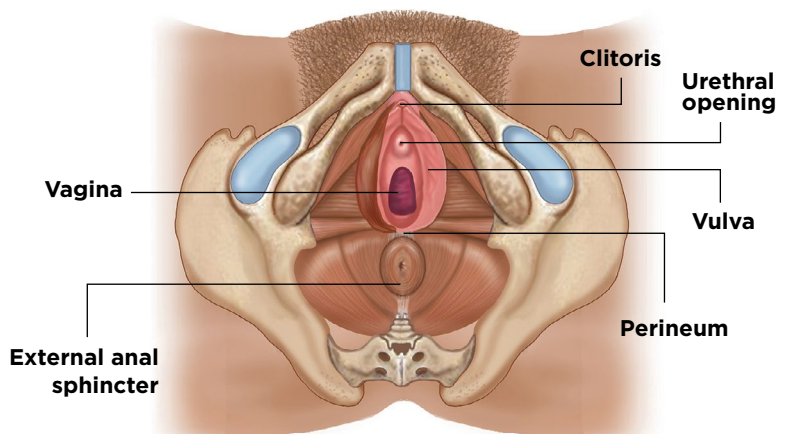


Fig 1. View of the pelvis when looking up towards the head. Modified from: *Assessment of the Pelvic Floor and Associated Musculoskeletal System: Guide for Medical Practitioners. Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery. 2021; 27(12):711-718. © American Urogynecologic Society.*

Pain can occur at the muscles (all the pink areas in the drawing) under the vagina and around the anus.

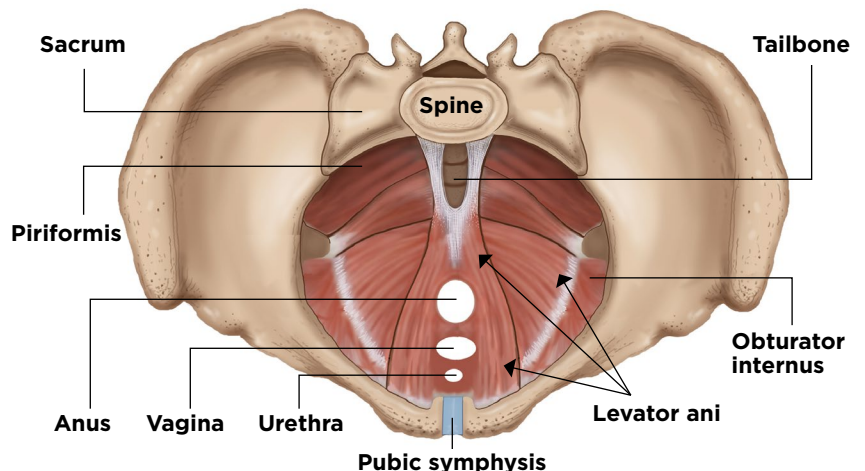


Fig 2. View of the pelvis when looking towards your feet. Modified from: *Assessment of the Pelvic Floor and Associated Musculoskeletal System: Guide for Medical Practitioners. Female Pelvic Medicine & Reconstructive Surgery. 2021; 27(12):711-718. © American Urogynecologic Society.*

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Treatment Options

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy: Therapists will help you with exercises, massages, or use of tools to help relax your pelvic floor.

Creams: Apply cream to the painful area as often as prescribed by your doctor. More might be needed for a larger area.

- Lidocaine: numbs the area
- Gabapentin*: improves nerve pain
- Amitriptyline*: improves nerve pain
- **Estrogen:** restores the thickness of your vaginal tissue and natural lubrication to the vagina
- Valium*: relaxes muscles
- Baclofen*: relaxes muscles

These creams can be used on their own or along with different physical therapy exercises.

Vaginal Dilators/Pelvic Wand: These can be used to gently stretch the muscles of the vagina and help them relax and be less painful.

- Talk to your doctor about what size of dilator to start with.
- Different pelvic wand companies exist. They have instructions and tips for use on their website or package insert.

Both the dilator and wand can be paired with creams to make their use less painful.

Trigger Point and Steroid injections: These can lessen inflammation of pelvic muscles which will help relax these muscles and overall lessen the pain.

Botulinum Toxin* Injections: These work by calming spastic muscles. Injecting this into pelvic muscles in spasm or those which are too tight can help them relax.

Other types of pelvic pain include endometriosis, vulvodynia, [female bladder pain syndrome](#) (previously known as “interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome”), infection, and gastrointestinal causes. This sheet doesn’t cover those, but your gynecologist or primary care doctor can tell you more about these issues.

*This is an off-label but clinically supported use of this medication.

Three Takeaways

1. Pelvic pain can be caused by tightness or spasm of many different muscles in the pelvis. The spasms can also cause trouble with the way certain pelvic organs such as your bladder and bowels work.
2. There are many treatment options for this type of musculoskeletal pelvic pain including pelvic floor exercises/physical therapy, dilators, and pain relief creams.
3. For pain that does not get better with these treatments, you can speak to your doctor about the next best steps.