

Managing pelvic pain without medication

Non-Pharmacological Pain Management Toolkit Library

Information for patients

Living well with pelvic pain can be challenging. The pain experienced can be worse during a pain flare-up. These pain flare ups can be predictable and associated with menstruation or occur randomly.

You have been admitted to hospital because your pain is severe, and our job is to help you manage the pain. Traditionally, pain would have been managed with strong painkillers, particularly opioid painkillers. We now understand however that this group of drugs is associated with a number of significant side effects and problems.

These include:

Tolerance - This is a process when your body becomes used to the painkillers, and they become less effective.

Dependence - This is a situation when your body starts to withdraw and you experience unpleasant side effects if you do not regularly take the medication, leading to addiction.

Endocrine Dysfunction - Your body's normal hormone production can be affected with patients experiencing lower energy levels, tiredness, loss of libido or sexual drive. In addition to the better-known side effects including constipation, itch, drowsiness, nausea and vomiting and urinary retention (when your bladder doesn't empty completely or at all).

Non-pharmacological pain management

There is increasing evidence that non-pharmacological pain management (controlling pain without using medication) is a better long-term strategy which allows patients better control of their symptoms.

We understand it is a balance, and that some medication is required. However, we are now encouraging all patients admitted with pain to read and use some/all of the resources provided within the Pain Toolkit Library to help better manage their pain. We hope that if you find some or all of them helpful you can continue to use them at home. The items and resources selected for the toolkit library have deliberately been picked because they are either free, or cheap to acquire.

Resources:

1. TENS machine
2. Heat/cool pads
3. Physio exercises
4. Relaxation app
5. Ear plugs.

TENS machine

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) is a method of pain relief involving the use of a mild electrical current.

A TENS machine is a small battery-operated device which has leads connected to sticky pads called electrodes. The electrodes are applied directly to your skin and when the machine is switched on a small electrical impulse are delivered to the affected area of your body, resulting in a tingling sensation.

The electrical impulses can reduce the pain signals going to the brain or spinal cord which helps relieve pain and relax muscles. The TENS machine will also help the body's production of endorphins - which are the body's natural painkillers.

The pads can be place on your front or back, or both, depending upon where you feel the pain. The TENS machine should be worn for a minimum of 30 minutes, but ideally longer. There is no maximum time limit. The red squares are examples of where you may wish to place the pads.



Heat/cold pads

The nerves which transmit pain messages to the brain also transmit temperature sensations too. This means if we activate some of the temperature nerves, we will limit the number of pain messages to be sent. Hence by applying either a heat or cold pain we can reduce the pain experienced. The heat pads can also help relax the muscles which commonly go into spasm and worsen your pain.

Gentle stretching exercises

Your muscles within your pelvis form a complex structure whose function is to support your torso and hold your internal organs within you. Pain within any part of your pelvis and abdomen can cause these muscles to become tight and go into spasm. This causes a further type of musculoskeletal pain. A bit like feeling tight and sore across your neck and shoulders when you have a headache.

We know gently stretching exercises can help relax these muscles and lessen then pain.

We have designed a set of simple exercises for you to do, in hospital when you are sore. Doing these exercises can help lessen your pain. You are free to draw the curtains round your bed if you would prefer privacy to perform them. They are designed to be done with you in your bed.

We also know gentle stretching exercises can help you return to your baseline of activity much sooner.

Please scan the QR code or visit the website below to be taken directly to the video demonstrating the exercises:

<https://vimeo.com/1047422704/dc9a45102b>



Relaxation techniques

Breathing Zone App

Breathing is one of the things that changes when we are stressed or in threat mode. Slowing down our breathing and finding a steady rhythm can help us to feel calmer. When we breathe in this way, the vagus nerve is stimulated. This is one of the nerves that connect the brain and the body. It acts to slow down heart rate and tells the body to relax. It also helps to slow down the mind and generate a sense of calm.

- Download the free Breathing Zone app
- Simply press Start and breathe in and out in time with the image
- Swipe left for Settings where you can control the colour of the image, sounds, breathing rate and length of time you want to do it for.

Breathing Zone website and app download:

www.breathing.zone



Soothing Rhythm Breathing

Soothing rhythm breathing is most helpful when practiced regularly, and often people find that it gets easier with practice. It can be helpful if you also practice it when you are not feeling too stressed. Once you have learned the technique, you will be able to use it to help bring your stress levels down. You can use it anywhere as you can do it subtly without anyone noticing.

Soothing Rhythm Breathing without the app

- Choose somewhere you can sit comfortably but remain alert.
- If you are seated, then place both feet flat on the floor and allow your arms and hands to relax. It is also possible to do this exercise lying down.
- Close your eyes or soften your gaze.
- Allow yourself to have a gentle facial expression.
- Start by focusing on your breathing without changing anything.
- Then, when you feel ready, try gently slowing your breathing to create a slow, even rhythm which feels comfortable to you.
- If it helps, you can use counting to aid your rhythm: e.g. 'in, 2, 3, 4 – pause – out, 2, 3, 4, 5', but you don't have to.
- Focus on your breathing. Notice the air coming in and going out, the gentle movement in your body and your muscles relaxing.
- Remember, it is normal for your mind to wander. Just notice when it happens and gently return your attention to your breathing.
- Notice how you feel. Notice the sense of slowing in your mind and body.

Ear plugs

Evidence tells us that being able to 'switch off' part of the brain and relax can significantly help lessen the pain experienced. We have provided ear plugs, as we recognise this is not always easy on a busy noisy ward.

Going home

The toolkit we have provided is for you to use during the duration of your admission. We hope that you will find it helps and reduces the amount of drugs which you require during your stay. All of the items above can be purchased at a low cost. We hope you can utilise some of them when you are back home too.

*TENS machine. These can be purchased relatively cheaply from online stores, or chemists. There are Pelvic Pain specific brands which often are more expensive. The cheaper brands are often as effective.

