

## Understanding Pelvic Pain

As strange as it sounds, pain is completely normal and necessary for survival. It is a warning system that alerts you to possible danger or injury, sometimes even before it happens. It can help with healing by making you move differently and protect an injured area. Pain can also be confusing and unpredictable which can make us fearful. Everyone's experience of pain is unique and individual but **the amount of pain you experience does not necessarily relate to the amount of tissue damage**



- Doing more of what you love, ie. laughing, being with friends or loved ones
- Addressing your lifestyle and what you are eating – lack of movement, lack of fresh air and poor nutrient-dense foods (or high inflammatory foods) can all feed into more danger messages being sent to the brain. Relaxing forms of yoga can be very beneficial
- Mastering your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes – meditation or mindfulness have great effects on calming down the nervous system
  - Headspace app
  - Smiling Mind app

Here are some facts about pain:

- The brain decides what is going on based on all the information it is arriving, all the time
- there are no “pain” messages, just “danger” messages sent to the brain
- Emotions, thoughts & beliefs are important in any experience of pain
- The longer you experience pain, the more sensitive the messaging system becomes
- The more you understand about pain, the less threatening your situation becomes to your brain

How to help to calm your nervous system

- Learning more about what pain is and how it works in the body

[www.lifeisnow.ca](http://www.lifeisnow.ca) by Neil Pearson – many free webinars and videos on information and exercises

[www.physioyoga.ca](http://www.physioyoga.ca) by Shelly Prosko – online DVD Creating Pelvic Floor Health, Part A and B  
[Explain Pain](#) by David Butler & Lorimer Mosely

- Being patient and persistent as you gradually increasing your activity level and movements – this is different for each individual
- Addressing your sleep! – this is when your body and brain have time out to heal, if you are not sleeping well, it will make recovery very difficult

What pain is and how it works:

**\*The following explanation has been taken from the amazing women at PelvicHealthSolutions.ca in Canada. They have summarized the pain system so well:**

### **The Pain System:**

Pain is a complex electrical and chemical response in our Nervous System. It also involves our Autonomic Nervous System, including our parasympathetic and sympathetic systems. These are regulatory systems in our body.



The nervous system is made up of:

1. Cells or neurons
2. Nerves –like electric wires
3. Chemicals that influence the communication of the message
4. Synapses – the gaps between cells and nerves

The danger sensors (thermal, chemical or mechanical) are triggered by events in our body and send a message, which is an electrical impulse along

the nerves to the spinal cord. At the spinal cord there is a gating mechanism that sorts the electrical impulses. The impulses can:

1. Leave the spinal cord quickly OR
2. Be delayed in leaving the spinal cord OR
3. Be cancelled altogether

What happens at the spinal cord depends on the chemical balance in your body at that time. The chemical balance is affected by many things including our thoughts, emotions, diet and lifestyle.

The electrical messages are *not* pain messages yet.

GABA, Endorphins, and Serotonin are chemicals which try to STOP the transfer of the pain message. Glutamate and Substance P are chemicals which increase the transfer of the pain message.

The brain has to make a sensible story of the information from the body. Many parts of the brain are involved:

- The memory centre: What happened the last time I had this problem?
- The learning centre: I don't want that to happen again
- The emotional centre: That was embarrassing or potentially embarrassing
- The thought centre: I don't want to miss any time at work
- The autonomic and immune systems: sense of general well-being
- The sensory centre: tight tissues causing irritation of the nerves

So it stands to reason that: if any part of the brain thinks the person is in danger from the threat or potential threat, it communicates this to the spinal cord through chemicals. This excites the spinal cord. This is called up-regulation.

Possible threats that can communicate danger to the brain are:

- Fear
- Stress, Anger

- Depression
- Negative thoughts and attitudes
- Painful memories

If the brain does not perceive a threat, it communicates this to the spinal cord through chemicals. This calms the spinal cord. This is called down-regulation.

When the spinal cord gets excited enough, it finally sends the threat message to the brain. This threat message is then processed along with other impulses in our brain, such as our thoughts, memories and other activities going on at the moment, and the brain decides whether it is going to create a pain response.

So the Pain Truths are:

- NO PERCEIVED THREAT= NO PAIN
- INCREASED THREAT= PAIN IS PRODUCED
- The brain decides how much PAIN you feel, not the tissues!
- Pain is an output response of the brain 100% of the time
- Our response to the pain can re-trigger more pain, perpetuating the pain cycle



**THE INTENSITY OF THE PAIN DOES NOT INDICATE THE AMOUNT OF TISSUE DAMAGE!**

**THE GOAL OF TREATMENT IS TO DOWN-REGULATE THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND ELIMINATE THE THREATS SO THAT THE BRAIN IS NO LONGER CREATING A PAIN RESPONSE**