



womenshealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease

Q: What is pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)?

A: PID is an infection of a woman's pelvic organs. The pelvic organs include the uterus (womb), fallopian tubes (tubes), ovaries, and other organs related to having babies.

Q: What causes PID?

A: Bacteria (a type of germ) moves up from a woman's vagina, infecting her tubes, ovaries, and womb. Many different types of germs can cause PID. But,

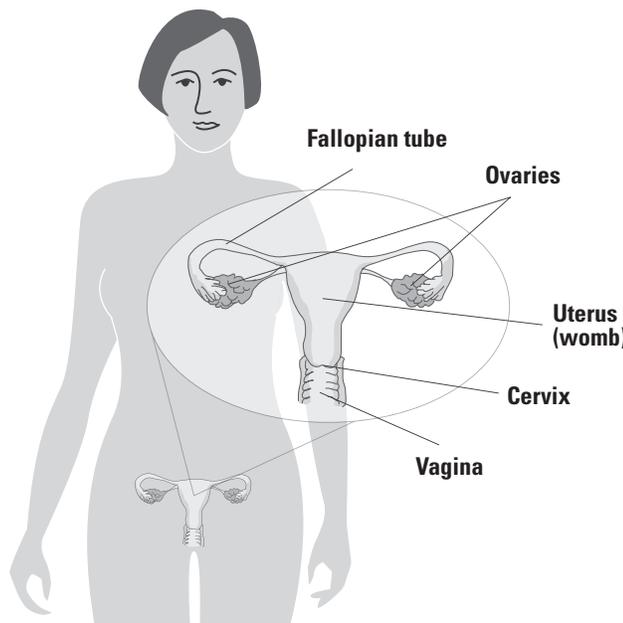
germs found in two common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—gonorrhea and chlamydia—are most often the cause of PID. After a person is infected, it can take from a few days to a few months to turn into PID.

It is rare, but you can get PID without having an STD. No one is sure why, but normal bacteria found in the vagina and on the cervix can sometimes cause PID.

Q: Are some women more likely to get PID?

A: Yes. You are more likely to get PID if you:

- have had an STD
- are under 25 and are having sex
- have more than one sex partner
- douche. Douching can push germs into the womb, ovaries, and tubes, causing infection. Douching can also hide the signs of an infection.
- have an intrauterine device (IUD). You're less likely to get PID if you're tested and treated for any infections before getting an IUD.



Q: How do I know if I have PID?

A: Many women have PID and don't know it. This is because sometimes women with PID don't have any symptoms. Still, some women do have symptoms, which can range from mild to severe. The most common symptom of PID is pain in your lower abdomen (stomach area). Other symptoms include:

- fever (99.6° or higher)
- vaginal discharge that may smell

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- painful sex
- painful urination
- irregular periods
- pain in the upper right abdomen (stomach area)

PID can come on fast with extreme pain and fever, especially if it is caused by gonorrhea.

Q: Are there any tests for PID?

A: It can be hard for your doctor to figure out if you have PID. Symptoms can be mild and are like symptoms of some other diseases. **If you think that you may have PID, see a doctor right away.** If you are treated right away, you'll be less likely to have long-term problems, such as infertility.

If you have pain in your lower abdomen (stomach area), your doctor will perform a physical exam. This will include a pelvic (internal) exam, which will help your doctor learn more about your pain. Your doctor will check for:

- abnormal vaginal or cervical discharge
- lumps near your ovaries and tubes
- tenderness or pain of your pelvic organs

Your doctor will also give you tests for STDs, urinary tract infection, and if needed, pregnancy. Your doctor also might test you for HIV and syphilis.

If needed, your doctor may do other tests.

- Ultrasound (sonogram) – a test that uses sound waves to take pictures of the pelvic area
- Endometrial (uterine) biopsy – a small piece of the endometrium

(the inside lining of the womb) is removed and tested

- Laparoscopy – a small tube with a light inside is inserted through your abdomen (stomach area) to look at your pelvic organs

These tests will help your doctor find out if you have PID or if you have a different problem that looks like PID.

Q: How is PID treated?

A: PID can be cured with antibiotics. Your doctor will work with you to find the best treatment for you. **You must take all your medicine, even if your symptoms go away.** The infection will not be fully cured if you do not take all of the medicine.

If PID is not treated, it can lead to severe problems like infertility, ectopic pregnancy, and constant pelvic pain.

Any damage done to your pelvic organs before you start treatment cannot be undone. Still, don't put off getting treatment. If you do, you may not be able to have children. **If you think you may have PID, see a doctor right away.**

Your doctor may suggest going into the hospital to treat your PID if you:

- are very sick
- are pregnant
- do not respond to or cannot take medicine through your mouth; if this is the case, you will need intravenous (in the vein or IV) antibiotics
- have a sore in a tube or ovary

If you still have symptoms or if the sore doesn't go away, you may need surgery. Problems of PID such as constant pelvic pain and scarring are often hard to treat,



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but sometimes they get better after surgery.

Q: What if my partner is infected?

A: Even if your sex partner doesn't have any symptoms, she or he could still be infected with bacteria that can cause PID. Protect yourself from being re-infected with PID.

- Your sex partner(s) should be treated even if she or he doesn't have symptoms.
- Don't have sex with a partner who hasn't been treated.

Q: My friend was told she can't get pregnant because she has PID. Is this true?

A: The more times you have PID, the more likely it is that you won't be able to have children. When you have PID, bacteria infect the tubes or cause inflammation of the tubes. This turns normal tissue into scar tissue, which can block your tubes and make it harder to get pregnant. Even having just a little scar tissue can keep you from getting pregnant.

Q: How can I keep myself from getting PID?

A: PID is most often caused by an STD that hasn't been treated. You can keep from getting PID by not getting an STD.

- The best way to prevent an STD is to not have sex of any kind.
- Have sex with one partner who doesn't have any STDs.

- Use condoms every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Read and follow the directions on the package. If condoms are used correctly, they can lower your chances of getting an STD.
- Don't douche. Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protect you from infection. This makes it easier for you to get an STD.
- If you're having sex, ask your doctor to test you for STDs. STDs found early are easier to treat.
- Learn the common symptoms of STDs. If you think you might have an STD, see your doctor right away.

Q: What should I do if I think I have an STD?

A: You may feel scared or shy about asking for information or help. Keep in mind, the sooner you seek treatment, the less likely the STD will cause you severe harm. And the sooner you tell your sex partner(s) that you have an STD, the less likely they are to re-infect you or spread the disease to others.

If you think you may have an STD, see a doctor right away. Doctors, local health departments, and STD and family planning clinics have information about STDs and many offer testing. The American Social Health Association (ASHA) keeps lists of clinics and doctors who provide treatment for STDs. Call ASHA at (800) 227-8922. You can get information from the phone line without leaving your name. ■



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For more information...

You can find out more about PID by contacting womenshealth.gov at 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Prevention Information Network

Phone Number(s): (800) 458-5231
Internet Address: <http://www.cdcnpin.org>

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Phone Number(s): (301) 496-5717
Internet Address:
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov>

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Phone Number(s): (800) 762-2264
Internet Address: <http://www.acog.org>

American Social Health Association

Phone Number(s): (800) 783-9877
Internet Address: <http://www.ashastd.org>

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