

## What is the outcome of pelvic inflammatory disease?

When you have finished your treatment you will need a follow-up test, usually another internal examination and a further set of swabs to check that the infection has cleared.

If it is treated quickly and completely, PID need not cause infertility. The risk of permanent damage to the female organs will be increased if you develop PID again. It is important to avoid future risk by always using condoms.

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# Pelvic inflammatory disease

## What is pelvic inflammatory disease?

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is an infection of the female reproductive organs, the uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes. PID may also spread along the tubes towards the ovaries and into the space around the female organs, the pelvic cavity.

## What causes pelvic inflammatory disease and who is at risk?

PID nearly always starts with a sexually transmitted infection. The most common types of sexually transmitted infection causing PID are bacteria called gonorrhoea and chlamydia. PID may develop when these infections are not treated adequately.

This can happen if a woman is not aware that she has gonorrhoea or chlamydia because she does not have any symptoms. It may also happen if an infection is not properly treated because she does not take all the prescribed medication. PID can develop straight after the initial infection, when it is called acute PID. If acute PID is left untreated or a woman has several attacks, chronic PID can develop after several months or even years.

As PID starts with sexually transmitted infections, the biggest risk factor is having

sex without using a condom. A woman who has had a large number of sexual partners, or who has sex with a man who has had a large number of partners, will also be at greater risk of getting PID.

Much less often, PID can begin when the neck of the womb (cervix) is open: after childbirth, during a miscarriage or an abortion, or when an intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) is inserted. There will be a greater risk if the woman already has an untreated infection.

## What are the common symptoms and complications of pelvic inflammatory disease?

Acute PID is a sudden severe illness that makes you very unwell. You may have:

- Severe pain in the lower abdominal (pelvic) area that may also be felt in the back

- High temperature, feeling 'hot and cold' and shaky
- Nausea and vomiting
- Vaginal discharge that is not normal, that is, heavy, discoloured, smells unpleasant

Chronic PID causes ill health over a long period of time. The symptoms are:

- Persistent pain in the pelvic area, made worse by intercourse
- Periods that are much heavier and more painful than before
- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Bleeding between the periods

The most worrying complication of PID is infertility. Scars that damage the fallopian tubes make it difficult for a fertilised egg to pass along the tube to the womb. After one infection, more than 10 per cent of women will suffer from infertility.

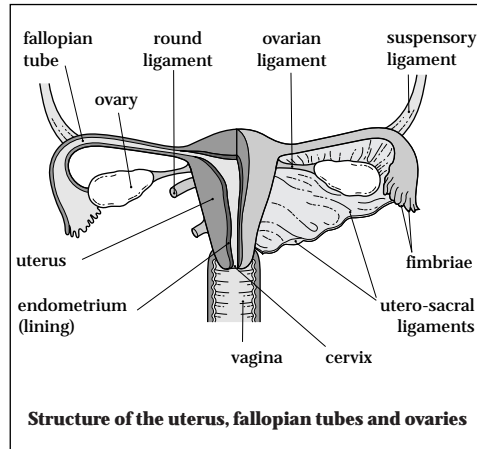
PID also increases the risk of ectopic pregnancy, when the fertilised egg implants in the fallopian tube because it cannot reach the womb. This is a dangerous condition and the tube will need to be removed during an operation.

Infection can collect on the tubes and cause abscesses that need to be removed surgically.

Long-term pain is a problem for some women, possibly caused by adhesions (scars in the pelvic cavity).

### How do doctors recognise pelvic inflammatory disease?

Your doctor will perform a vaginal examination to find out if the womb and tubes are tender and whether there are any swellings. Swabs will be taken from inside



the vagina and the cervix to test for bacteria. You may have an ultrasound scan using an internal probe in the vagina to look for an abscess.

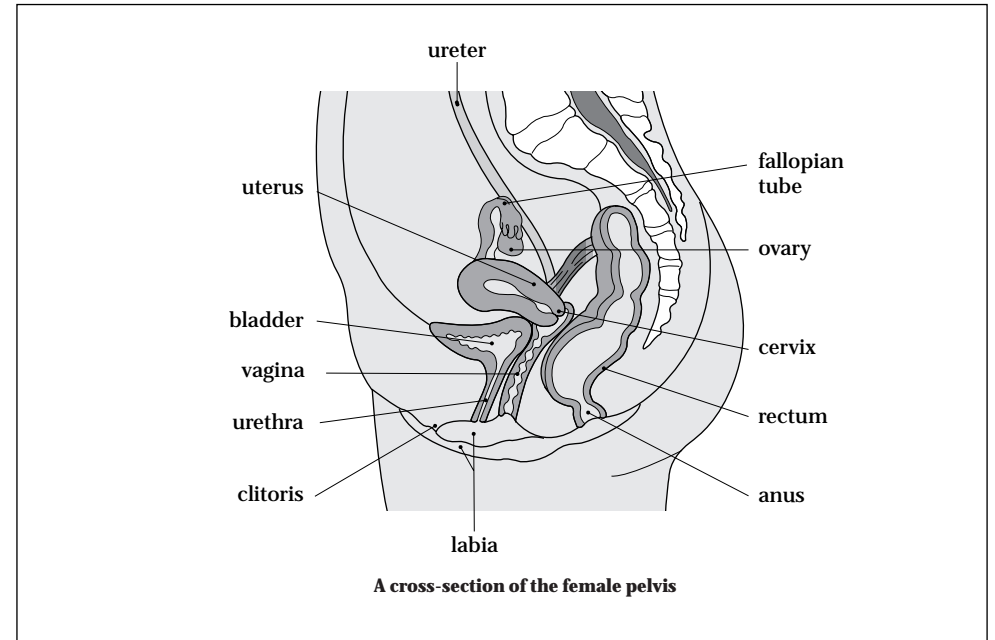
You may be referred to hospital for a laparoscopy. This is a test done under a local or a general anaesthetic, during which a gynaecologist inserts a telescopic camera through a one centimetre cut under the navel, to look at the organs in the pelvic cavity.

### What is the treatment for pelvic inflammatory disease?

#### Self-care action plan

The most effective way to protect yourself from PID is always to use a condom during sex. If you think you have been at risk of an infection or if you already have symptoms, contact your doctor straight away. The sooner you are treated the lower the risk of infertility.

A woman who has PID should make sure that her partner is tested and treated



immediately. If a man has any sexually transmitted infection, he should also tell his partner immediately. The partner may not know they have an infection as they may have no symptoms. It is vital that both partners have treatment to make sure they do not continue to carry the infection and give it back to each other, resulting in chronic PID.

You should not have sex, even with a condom, until you have both finished your treatment and have been examined a second time. Meanwhile, try to rest if you can and drink plenty of fluids.

#### Medicines

PID is treated with a course of antibiotic tablets, usually for two weeks. Severe acute PID will be treated with antibiotic injections in hospital, at least for the first day. It is very important to finish all the tablets to prevent the infection from coming back. You will be given two or three different types of antibiotics to cover all the possible bacteria that cause PID. Amoxycillin, metronidazole and doxycycline are three of the commonly used kinds. If you are allergic to an antibiotic or have any side effects, tell your doctor.

If you have pain, paracetamol or ibuprofen may be helpful. If this is not enough, ask your doctor for a stronger painkiller.