

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is an infection of a woman's reproductive organs. Usually PID is caused by bacteria from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Sometimes PID is caused by normal bacteria found in the vagina. If left untreated, PID can cause problems getting pregnant, problems during pregnancy, and long-term pelvic pain.

Q: Who gets PID?

A: PID affects about 5 percent of women in the United States. Your risk for PID is higher if you:

- Have had an STI
- Have had PID before
- Are younger than 25 and have sex. PID is most common in women 15 to 24 years old.
- Have more than one sex partner or have a partner who has multiple sexual partners
- Douche. Douching can push bacteria into the reproductive organs and cause PID. Douching can also hide the signs of PID.
- Recently had an intrauterine device (IUD) inserted. The risk of PID is higher for the first few weeks only after insertion of an IUD. PID is rare after that time period. Getting tested for STIs before the IUD is inserted lowers your risk for PID.

Q: What are the signs and symptoms of PID?

A: Many women do not know they have PID, because they do not have any signs or symptoms. When symptoms do happen, they can be mild or more serious. Signs and symptoms include:

- Pain in the lower abdomen (this is the most common symptom)

- Fever (100.4° F or higher)
- Vaginal discharge that may smell foul
- Painful sex
- Pain when urinating
- Irregular menstrual periods
- Pain in the upper right abdomen (this is rare)

If you think that you may have PID, see a doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

Q: How is PID treated?

A: Your doctor or nurse will give you antibiotics to treat PID. Most of the time, at least two antibiotics are used that work against many different types of bacteria. **You must take all of your antibiotics, even if your symptoms go away.** This helps to make sure the infection is fully cured. See your doctor or nurse again two to three days after starting the antibiotics to make sure they are working.

Q: How can I prevent PID?

A: You may not be able to prevent PID. It is not always caused by an STI. Sometimes, normal bacteria in your vagina can travel up to your reproductive organs and cause PID.

But you can lower your risk of PID by not douching. You can also prevent STIs by not having vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

If you do have sex, lower your risk of getting an STI with the following steps:

- **Use condoms.** Condoms are the best way to prevent STIs when you have sex. Because a man

does not need to ejaculate (come) to give or get STIs, make sure to put the condom on before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus. Other methods of birth control, such as birth control pills, shots, implants, or diaphragms, will not protect you from STIs.

- **Get tested.** Be sure you and your partner are tested for STIs. Talk to each other about the test results before you have sex.
- **Be monogamous.** Having sex with just one partner can lower your risk for STIs. After being tested for STIs, be faithful to each other. That means that you have sex only with each other and no one else.

- **Limit your number of sex partners.** Your risk of getting STIs goes up with the number of partners you have.
- **Do not douche.** Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protect you from infection. Douching may also raise your risk for PID by helping bacteria travel to other areas, like your uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes.
- **Do not abuse alcohol or drugs.** Drinking too much alcohol or using drugs increases risky behavior and may put you at risk of sexual assault and possible exposure to STIs.

The steps work best when used together. No single step can protect you from every single type of STI.

For more information...

For more information about PID, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP), CDC, HHS
800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov/nchhstp

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), NIH, HHS
866-284-4107 • www.niaid.nih.gov

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
800-673-8444 • www.acog.org

American Sexual Health Association
919-361-8400 • www.ashastd.org

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