A Difficult Diagnosis

What to make of aching below the belly button and above the hip that lasts at least six months?

March 2, 2020 By Kate Ferguson

Chronic pelvic pain may be sharp and can range from mild to severe enough to interfere with normal activities. This problem haunted one woman for almost 17 years.

“I’d tried everything, including physical therapies and different recommendations that doctors had made, and I’d exhausted what I felt were any options,” she says. “I’d quit my job. I didn’t want to work anymore. I was constantly nauseated from the pain.”

Finally, she found a team of doctors who properly diagnosed the problem and helped her get relief.

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, chronic pelvic pain may be caused by a wide variety of conditions. The pain may not be linked to a woman’s reproductive organs and may result from urinary tract or bowel issues.

Men also suffer from the condition, which may result from swelling and inflammation of the prostate gland, among other potential causes.

Pain in some individuals could be caused by more than one factor, or doctors may find no reason whatsoever for the aching.

The first step to identifying the source of the pain, however, is to get a physical, including a pelvic exam. In addition, doctors may order tests such as X-rays, MRI scans, ultrasound, colonoscopy, laparoscopy, cystoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.

Experts suggest that patients work with specialists, such as a gastroenterologist and urogynecologist, to address the condition. Additionally, doctors may recommend medications, physical therapy, nutritional therapy or surgery to help relieve the pain.

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