



Pelvic Pain: Why Integrative Medicine Makes Sense

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Key Ideas

- Integrative medicine treats the whole person (body, mind, spirit). It addresses all aspects of lifestyle.
- Pelvic pain is complicated. It has many causes and contributors. Integrative medicine gives us more options to treat pelvic pain.
- Integrative medicine includes other traditional medical approaches such as acupuncture and herbal medicine, and mind-body approaches such as meditation and *qi gong*. It also includes hands on treatments like chiropractic care.

Integrative medicine and pelvic pain

What is an integrative medicine approach and focus?

- Integrative medicine takes the whole person—mind, body, and spirit—into account and addresses all aspects of lifestyle. The goal is to find balance and maintain health. This is a different approach from conventional medical theory which focuses on treating disease.
- Integrative medicine uses both conventional or “western medicine” *and* alternative medicine. The best therapy is one that maximizes benefit and minimizes harm.
- Integrative medicine explores many different treatment options. The patient makes his or her own healthcare decisions with guidance from the provider.

What are the challenges in female pelvic pain disorders in the current medical system?

- Pelvic pain describes a symptom. There are many things that can lead to pelvic pain.
- Pain is experienced in different ways by different people. A treatment that works for one person might not work for another. There is no one treatment for pelvic pain that works well for everyone.

- Not every provider has been trained in how to diagnose or treat pelvic pain. Finding a provider who understands pelvic pain and the many treatment options is important.

What would an integrative approach to pelvic pain look like?

- Integrative medicine tries to put the puzzle of pelvic pain together. Some common puzzle pieces in pelvic pain include stress, inflammation, movement, posture, and nutrition.
- When we feel pain, we are really feeling a signal from an organ, muscle, or nerve. The signal then travels through nerves. The nerves take the message to the spinal cord and brain. The brain interprets the message as pain. Integrative medicine includes many different methods to address pain at each of these levels.

Methods of Integrative Medicine

| Whole medical systems and traditional medicine | Mind-body interventions | Manipulative and body-based methods | Natural products |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Naturopathy | Yoga, <i>tai chi</i> , <i>qi gong</i> | Chiropractic medicine | Nutrition and eating patterns |
| Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) | Psychotherapy or “talk” therapy | Osteopathic medicine | Dietary supplements |
| Traditional Indian (Ayurvedic) Medicine | Mindfulness and meditation | Physical therapy | Aromatherapy |
| Anthroposophical Medicine | Biofeedback | Massage | |
| Homeopathy | Art and Music therapy | | |
| | Spiritual practice and prayer | | |

What are the different categories and methods of integrative medicine?

- There are four categories of integrative medicine:
 - 1. Whole medical systems and traditional medicine**
 - This describes an entire system of medicine outside of the conventional “western medicine.”
 - Examples include naturopathy, traditional medicine (such as Ayurveda and Chinese Medicine), and homeopathy.
 - Naturopathy treats diseases with “natural” means. Examples include diet, exercise, and massage.
 - Traditional Chinese and Asian Medicine describes a system of medicine that is over two thousand years old. It heals by restoring energy flow and balance to the body. Treatment examples include acupuncture and herbal therapies.
 - 2. Mind-body interventions**
 - Mind-body interventions focus on healing the connection relationship that the mind has with the body, and vice versa.

- Examples of this include yoga, tai chi, qi gong, meditation, talk therapy, relaxation, biofeedback, art/music therapy, and prayer.

3. Manipulative and body-based methods

- These methods aim to heal the physical body, targeting the nerve, muscles, and bones.
- Examples of this include physical manipulations (chiropractic, osteopathic), physical therapy (PT), and massage.

4. Natural products

- Diet and healthy eating influence our health. Diet and some natural supplements can help reduce inflammation in the body.
- Aromatherapy is the use of essential oil as a treatment. The scent of the oil heals the body and the mind.



Caption: Image on the left is a picture of mixed dried herbs of dark brown and maroon colors used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (source: [Pixabay](#)). Image on the right is a young woman dressed in blue shirt and purple leggings, sitting on a yoga mat with legs crossed. Her palms are held together in the center and in front of her face (source: [Pxfuel](#)).

An Important Note:

- Integrative Medicine research is mixed. It is important to discuss the risks and benefits of these therapies with your healthcare provider.

Have questions?

Schedule an appointment to talk to your local pelvic pain specialist!

Find a provider near you on the IPPS website: pelvicpain.org.

References

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