

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)

What is a Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)?

PID is the name given to a group of infections which can affect the lining of the womb and/or the fallopian tubes and surrounding tissues. PID is often so mild that it produces no symptoms, but it can occasionally cause quite severe pelvic symptoms (see below).

What causes PID?

There are two main groups of germs which cause PID - those which are present normally in some parts of your body, and those which can be passed on during sexual intercourse. When these germs get through the cervix (neck of the womb), PID can sometimes occur.

Your body normally protects you from PID by creating a tough layer of "antiseptic" mucus across the entrance to the cervix. Anything which disrupts this (such as having a minor gynaecological procedure, eg fitting of an intrauterine coil device) can make some women more prone to PID. Of course, this is much more likely if there is an infection already present in the vagina or cervix.

What are the symptoms of PID?

Very often, symptoms are extremely mild and may go unnoticed. If present, they may include pelvic discomfort, irregular bleeding or deep pain during penetrative sex. Your partner may also have symptoms, but even if this is not the case, examination and treatment for both of you is usually recommended to minimise the risk of recurrence of PID for you.

How do I know if I have PID?

PID can **sometimes** lead to blockage of the fallopian tubes - this is naturally a concern for women. However, it is important to put this risk into perspective. Generally, it depends on how many episodes of PID you have. The risk is probably well below 5% if you have one mild episode; if you have three or more episodes of PID, some research studies suggest that the chance of having difficulty with conceiving may be as high as 50%. So it is important that you and your partner receive adequate treatment to prevent recurrent episodes of PID.

How is PID treated?

The diagnosis of PID is usually made by a doctor, based on your symptoms and a pelvic examination. Swab tests are taken for a whole range of different infections from both you and, if applicable, your partner. Occasionally (especially if your symptoms are not settling with treatment) the doctor may recommend a more accurate way of assessing the pelvic organs - this is called "laparoscopy". Under general anaesthetic, a fine telescope instrument is passed through the muscle layers below the navel and a direct internal view is obtained of the whole abdomen.

What is the risk of fertility problems after PID?

Treatment usually involves a 1-2 week course of antibiotics - make sure that you take the tablets at regular intervals and finish the course. Even if your partner has no symptoms, it is very important that you both complete the course of antibiotics. This is crucial in minimising the chance of recurrent episodes of PID.