

The relationship between pelvic vein incompetence and chronic pelvic pain in women: systematic reviews of diagnosis and treatment effectiveness

Rita Champaneria,¹ Laila Shah,¹ Jonathan Moss,²
Janesh K Gupta,³ Judy Birch,⁴ Lee J Middleton¹
and Jane P Daniels^{1*}

¹Birmingham Clinical Trials Unit, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

²Department of Radiology, North Glasgow University Hospitals, Glasgow, UK

³Institute of Metabolism and Systems Biology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

⁴Pelvic Pain Support Network, Poole, UK

*Corresponding author

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Pelvic congestion syndrome is a rare but possible cause of chronic pelvic pain in women; in particular, the pain is often described as a kind of pain felt after a long period of standing up. This is thought to be due to the veins in the pelvis becoming widened and the blood flow through them becoming slow, similar to what happens in varicose veins of the leg. These dilated veins can be seen on ultrasound, but may be missed if the test is performed while the patient is lying down. Doctors can block these problem veins to reduce pain symptoms.

However, not everyone agrees that the dilated veins cause pain. Furthermore, the vein-blocking treatment has not been compared against other treatments, and so the reported improvements in pain symptoms may be exaggerated.

Our project aimed to methodically look at all of the previous published research in the world regarding pelvic congestion syndrome. We found that pelvic congestion is not clearly defined and that many women do not know about it. We could not be sure how well ultrasound and other scans identify dilated veins, and whether or not women with dilated veins always have pain. We estimated that about 75% of women had improvements in symptoms after the vein blocking procedure.

We do not think that there is enough information to be absolutely sure that dilated pelvic veins do cause pelvic pain and that the vein-blocking procedure is a worthwhile treatment. We think that doctors should be made aware of pelvic congestion syndrome, but considerable further research is needed and would be welcomed by both doctors and patients.

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Editorial contact: nhredit@southampton.ac.uk

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