The Secret to Healing Pelvic Pain

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The secret to freeing yourself from chronic pelvic pain is a multi-level approach. No one approach alone is going to give you lasting relief.

I know this after having suffered from chronic pelvic pain (including vaginal soreness, bladder symptoms, pain with standing and sitting, and abdominal pain) for over 20 years. I also know this from having worked with many women who were stuck in pain and who found relief with a multi-level approach.

Most people see their medical doctor when they begin having pain or discomfort in the pelvic area. Typically, the doctor checks first for any kind of infection that could be causing the pain, such as a vaginal yeast infection, bladder infection or pelvic inflammatory disease or for men bladder infections or prostatitis. If these problems aren’t present and/or treatment with medication doesn’t eliminate the pain, they’ll look further to find other causes. If they can’t identify anything obvious causing your pain many medical doctors are at a loss as to what to do next. They will likely prescribe antibiotics, antidepressants, antianxiety, or pain medications or all of the above. Medications will probably dull or mask the pain but not eliminate it. You may still have pain flare-ups.

It’s absolutely imperative that you first get treated by a medical doctor to rule out any life-threatening illnesses. Once you have been reassured that you don’t have a life-threatening illness and especially if you get a diagnosis with any of the mind-body syndromes in the Appendix, you’re a good candidate for the mind-body approach to healing pelvic pain.

The information in this document is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to treat, diagnose, cure or prevent any disease. Please consult your health care provider before undertaking any diet, supplement, exercise or other health program.

Missing Link

What most medical doctors miss in treating pelvic pain is the nerve and muscle pain connection. Most people who experience chronic pelvic pain have chronically tight muscles that affect their nerves and keep them in pain. You can benefit from the right kind of physical therapy to release the tight spots in your muscles. These tight spots are called “trigger points.”
When people hold a lot of tension in their bodies, it creates trigger points in the muscles. Trigger points are in such a habit of holding that they generally won’t release on their own. Once they’re released for the first time, they usually tighten up again. They may need to be released multiple times until you learn to stay relaxed. There are often a series of trigger points in your muscles that play off each other that need releasing. Trigger points often refer pain to other parts of body than where they’re located. My favorite book that teaches all about trigger points and how to locate and release them yourself is **The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook, by Clair Davies**.

There are many other body work approaches to reducing pain that can work too. I recommend trying several different types of physical therapy, massage therapy or other body based therapies to find the one that’s most effective for you. It does make a difference who your physical therapist is. You need to find someone you trust, are comfortable with, and who is compatible with you. If you aren’t getting the results you expect or you know you’re uncomfortable with a physical therapist or body worker, try someone else.

### Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

You’ll probably benefit from pelvic floor physical therapy. Again, it’s really important to find a physical therapist you’re comfortable with and who has the approach and methods that really work for you. I worked with several pelvic floor physical therapists before I found one that used trigger point release. He treated my pelvic floor tightness through both the vaginal and rectum areas and external trigger points in my bottom, thighs, and abdomen. Finding a physical therapist who will teach you to release your own trigger points is invaluable and will save you a lot of time and money in the long run.

### TMS

Dr. John Sarno, M.D. coined the term Tension Myositis Syndrome or TMS. It’s the same thing as mind-body syndrome. TMS is caused by tension in the tissues (muscles and nerves) which causes mild oxygen deprivation felt as pain as well as many other symptoms. The cause of tight muscles is unconscious resistance to feeling uncomfortable emotions or other resistance or other psychological conflicts.

Physical therapy can help get you started with healing pelvic pain, but until the underlying patterns of holding tension in the body related to stress are addressed, the trigger points will keep coming back. Mind-body healing practices can help cure mind-body syndrome pain. Look for more on this later in the document.
Limitations of Health Insurance

You might find that your health insurance won’t pay for your pelvic floor physical therapy. To be effective the experts on the cutting edge of treating chronic pelvic pain need to spend more time with their patients than most insurance companies in general allow for.

My insurance company didn’t pay for the pelvic pain physician I saw and also didn’t pay for the Wise-Anderson pelvic pain clinic I attended. However, the treatment I got was absolutely worth my out-of-pocket investment.

There may be other alternative healing approaches you would benefit from that will also be out-of-pocket expenses. These may be well worth the investment. You won’t know unless you try them.

Exercise

I spent many years trying to rest my pain away and avoid moving my body in ways that caused more pain. For several months I couldn’t even bend over without triggering increased pain. It was a challenge when things dropped on the floor which seemed to happen a lot! Trying to limit my movements and resting the pain away didn’t heal my pain.

That’s because the human body is meant to move. Once you get your trigger points released you should be able to resume regular physical exercise without major flare-ups of symptoms. It’s important to keep your muscles flexible and strong to help prevent trigger points from reoccurring and to stay healthy. The more experiences you have with moving your body without increased pain and then without pain will give you confidence that there’s nothing wrong with you and you will learn to trust your body again.

After I attended the Wise-Anderson pelvic pain clinic I started taking a weekly yoga class and practicing yoga daily at home. I also walk every day and get up regularly from sitting to stand or move my body. I’m now much stronger, more resilient, and less likely to flare up. I highly recommend that you regularly practice some type of stretching and strengthening exercise.

Diet

What you eat and drink can affect how you feel. What’s most important in your diet is for it to be balanced with mostly healthy and natural food and drinks. Make eating fresh vegetables and fruits daily a high priority. Make sure you get enough healthy
protein and fats. Limit sugary and caffeinated drinks and processed foods. Educate yourself on what is currently considered a healthy diet. Don't get caught up in fear around certain foods causing your pain. Pay attention to how you feel after eating certain foods and experiment with your diet to find an approach that leaves you feeling well and with energy. Learn from my experience with a diet based on fear, how I overcame it, and eat any food I want to now.

Stay hydrated. When you have painful bladder symptoms there’s a tendency to restrict the amount of fluids you drink in order to reduce symptoms. In the long run this doesn’t work and can hinder your health. It's important for normal body functioning to stay well hydrated. A great way to stay hydrated and not aggravate bladder symptoms with a suddenly full bladder is what I learned from working with a naturopathic physician. He instructed me to drink two ounces of water every 30 minutes during the day. This helps to keep the body well hydrated and softens and keeps things moving in the digestive track. I start this practice when I get up in the morning and stop a few hours before bedtime.

Your Healing Team

It's important to assemble a healing team for your multi-level approach to healing. In addition to your general practitioner you’ll need a doctor who specializes in your type of pelvic pain. You’ll need to find a skilled physical therapist that you trust, and you’ll need emotional support such as a psychotherapist, life coach, or mind-body coach. Add any other specialist that feels right for you.

You are in charge of your healing team and you get to pick and choose who is on it. If any team member is not respectful of you, you have the right to remove him or her from your team and find someone else you’re more compatible with. For whatever reason, it’s not uncommon to encounter incompetent, insensitive or indifferent doctors or specialists. Especially when asking doctors for help with pelvic pain we’re more likely to have negative encounters (Deborah Coady, M.D. “Healing Painful Sex.”) I had one gynecologist early on tell me “You’ll have to learn to live with it.” That comment felt very unsupportive when I didn’t know what to do next.

Trial and Error

In order to find the right combination of healing approaches that really worked for me I tried many different things as I followed the logical next steps and also trusted my intuitive hunches. Since we’re all different, the combination of approaches that work best for me may be different for you. That’s why it’s important to try a variety of approaches to your healing. It’s through trial and error that you’ll find your own specific combination. It’s going to take time and money and it’s worth your quality of life to invest in yourself in this way. Do try the conservative and less invasive or risky approaches first before you go to the more drastic and expensive treatments.
**Medication**

Don’t feel like a failure if you need some type of medication to help calm your nervous system to reduce symptoms. Medication may be temporary or long term. Many people find medication is part of the multi-level approach to successfully heal pelvic pain. Finding a medication that works for you will also require a process of trial and error. Don’t be afraid to say no to a medication when you know it’s not working for you or doesn’t feel right to you.

Be very careful when using medication that can be addictive. Start with a conservative approach to your medication. Before I found the right physical therapy and mind-body practices I tried several antidepressants to help with chronic pain and the depression that comes with it. At various times I was on pain killers or antianxiety meds too. I occasionally used a muscle relaxant when I had severe flare-ups.

Any medical decisions you make including medications should be done in consultation with your medical doctor. I have a good relationship with my primary care physician and he has supported me in different medical approaches I researched and requested his help with.

**The Nervous System**

Do everything you can to calm your nervous system. This includes meditation and resting practices, calming your mind activity through thought work, learning to feel rather than resist the physical sensations of emotions and healing your past traumas. Mind-body practices can help you calm your mind, feel your emotions rather than resist them, and help you connect with your own inner wisdom. It dials down the overactive nervous system and gets it out of being chronically in the fight, flight, or freeze response which can be a major factor in chronic pain. All of this reduces the tension and stress in the body and allows it heal.

**Trauma Triggers**

In the mind-body system it’s common for current events to trigger unconscious emotional and physiological responses when it feels like stressful or traumatic experiences from your past. Learning to allow and feel suppressed emotions from the past and feel them along with current emotions allows old stored emotional energy to be released too. This works to change the pattern of suppression to one of expression and effectively releases stuck emotional energy from the body allowing for a calmer nervous system and deeper rest.

Resistance to feeling difficult emotions is just one of the ways the fight, flight, or freeze side of the nervous system gets triggered. Other triggers include painful or limiting thoughts and beliefs, difficult situations or physical sensations, especially those that are
similar to anything else in your past that was challenging or traumatic. The nervous system automatically follows the same neural pathways that helped you survive past events, but this isn’t healthy in the long run. You can learn what your triggers are, how your body automatically responds and create new habits that are healthier and feel better to your body.

**Stress Accumulation**

Chronic pain is the result of overreaction of your nervous system to everyday stress. There are two sides of the nervous system, parasympathetic (rest and digest) and sympathetic (fight, flight or freeze). Chronic pain can result when you’re in the fight, flight, or freeze side of the nervous system more often than the rest and digest side.

When you’re in chronic pain you have an over accumulation of stress in your body. This makes your nervous system over reactive. It’s like there’s a dust storm inside your nervous system making it difficult to see clearly. When you’re chronically stressed the fight, flight, or freeze side of your nervous system is always on at a low-level and ready to react at a moment’s notice to any perceived danger. You’ve had this low-level stress for so long it feels normal to you. When you add current triggering experiences to already low-level accumulated stress it triggers a heightened response in the nervous system. On top of that you’re likely to be in a pain-stress-pain spin cycle which elevates the fight, flight, or freeze response even more.

**Pain-Stress-Pain Spin Cycle**

An example of the pain-stress-pain spin cycle is you have an increase in pain. It scares you and your body floods with stress hormones making you more on guard for anything threatening to your well-being. This tightens your muscles resulting in mild oxygen deprivation which when chronic can create inflammation and more pain. You get more scared and you feel helpless and trapped in your own body. You’re afraid of being afraid of the pain. Your mind tries to find a way to stop the pain as soon as possible. Your nervous system reacts as if your life is in danger and you must do something now to stop the pain. Now you’re feeling anxiety on top of the pain which makes you feel even worse. Then it all repeats again.

**Resting Practices**

A great way to start with mind-body practice is to do resting meditations on a daily basis. This teaches your nervous system how to more easily drop out of stress and into rest where true healing takes place. I have a free recording available [here](www.gailkennylifecoach.com). One of my favorite resting practices is Open Focus meditation. This is where you think about space in and around your body which allows the mind to let go of logical thinking and go into restful alpha brain waves. Find out more about Open Focus [here](www.gailkennylifecoach.com).
Making getting a good night’s sleep a high priority can help you recover from your symptoms, bring your hormones into balance, and dramatically decrease muscle and nerve pain. Mind-body practices along with practicing healthy sleep habits can significantly calm your nervous system so that you consistently get quality sleep.

**Emotions**

In pain syndromes physical discomfort kicks you into a survival method (activating the fight, flight, or freeze response) that tries to protect you by focusing on the pain and through logical analysis of the problem to get rid of discomfort as soon as possible. It results in obsessing about the pain while resisting or fighting discomfort. This doesn’t work in the long run. It’s a distraction from feeling physical sensations of emotions which the mind perceives as dangerous. This intense and narrow focus keeps you in logical analysis resulting in tight muscles, shallow breathing, and continued activation of the stressful side of the nervous system.

If you are unconscious about resisting feeling emotions, it’s important to learn how to be aware that you are having an emotion and to allow yourself to attend to feeling it as a physical sensation instead of not feeling it. Not feeling it causes muscles to contract and leads to physical pain.

*Learning to feel emotions is the most essential mind-body skill.*

It can be challenging to learn how to turn toward feeling emotions if you’re in the unconscious habit of resisting them. You can greatly benefit from learning how to feel the emotions in your body again through working with a mind-body coach. You can start practicing feeling emotions now with this simple meditation:

**Opening to Emotions Meditation**

Use this practice at a time of day when you are less likely to fall asleep but relaxed enough to be still for 5 to 20 minutes. Find a quiet place where you will be undisturbed. I like to do this lying down comfortably on my back, but sitting or reclining works too.

1. Close your eyes and focus your attention on your breathing for a few breaths.
2. As you feel your breath moving in and out, become aware of the physical sensations in your body.
3. Notice where you’re holding tension (or any other areas of discomfort) and give them permission to be present in your body and to be felt more fully.
4. Allow the physical sensations to increase or subside or stay the same, and breathe deeply with them. You’re just noticing and allowing the physical sensations.
5. Get a sense of any emotions that are attached to the physical sensations. These might be emotions you are having about the discomfort or the emotions underlying them.

6. Intend to feel the emotions behind the physical sensations rather than the emotions you’re feeling about having the discomfort. But if all you can feel are your emotions about the discomfort, that’s okay. Once you have felt the surface emotions, you’ll be more likely to be able to access the underlying emotions.

7. Allow the emotions to be felt more fully and breathe with the sensations as they ebb and flow. You are validating the emotion, not the cause of the emotion.

8. It’s okay if no emotions come up. Just allow the physical sensations to ebb and flow as you breathe with them. Breathing deeply will allow you to stay with the feeling and the emotions and physical sensations will dissipate in their own time.

9. Notice when your mind goes into the story connected to the emotions. Bring your attention back to your breathing and your body while letting go of the mind story.

10. Cry, shake, or do whatever your body needs, but allow the emotions to continue, and keep breathing with them. Be compassionate and open to the emotions by making space for them to be felt. Emotions are like the weather in that they come and go. Emotions pass through the body like a storm that brews. Wind blows, it rains or snows, and then it’s over and it’s calm again and the sun comes back out.

11. Welcome all emotions and notice the physical sensations you have and accept them. Send them love from your heart. Trust that you will know when your body is done processing emotions for now.

Take Charge of Your Mind

How you think can have a negative effect on how your body feels. Mind spinning or obsessive thinking is especially stressful. Your mind wants to help you get rid of the pain or discomfort as soon as possible. It goes to analysis and logic to solve the problem of pain. It tells stories about the pain that can activate the stress response even more which can make the experience of pain or discomfort more intense. This activity can keep you from feeling any emotions that are underlying the pain and discomfort. This response is like attacking the smoke alarm when it’s going off instead of looking for the smoke to put the fire out.

Pain and discomfort is simply a signal that something needs your attention. When your mind takes your attention away from receiving the signals from your body or emotions the signal has to get more insistent to be noticed. When this happens it’s time to calm the mind by using your attention to allow the pain or discomfort to be present, to feel it instead of resisting it for one breath at a time. Use your mind’s obsession about solving the problem of the pain or discomfort as a signal to feel more deeply into your body and emotions and you’re likely to find your mind will calm down.
There are many ways to work with calming your mind including Byron Katie’s The Work thought work method.

**Spiritual Connection**

Learning to connect more completely with your body and emotions also connects you more directly with spiritual aspects of life. The connection to spirit, which is greater than personality or physical body, is more completely accessed through feeling sensations in the body rather than looking outside of you. We all have a connection to spirit or spirituality that’s part of our whole beings. I think of spirit as that shared connection of energy with God, the Universe, All That Is, that which is unseen but is a vital life force which animates all of life and fills connects everything.

Spiritual connection is what makes life meaningful. It’s affirms our worthiness simply for the fact that we are alive. Our worthiness is not measured in what we do. The body is the vessel for spiritual connection to us and everything else. The body helps us feel emotions connected with spirit. Our bodies allow us to feel giving and receiving of love, which is part of aliveness. Learning to more fully connect with your body puts you more in touch with your holiness, who you really are and “what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” (Mary Oliver poem, The Summer Day). It’s a coming home that brings clarity to your true self and connects you with your wise and intuitive self.

**Intuition**

The body is the main intuitive device rather than the mind. The mind’s role is to interpret the wisdom of the body, soul and emotions. Just as learning to connect more completely with your body and your sense of spirit, you also can more clearly access intuition through the felt senses. When you’re disconnected from your body and emotions your connection with your intuition is weaker. Intuition is an inner knowing that’s connected with the unconscious mind which operates at a much greater speed than the verbal mind. Intuition is when you know something, before you can logically explain it. It’s also characterized as gut feeling. Intuition communicates through your imagination and the felt senses in your body, to lead you on your own unique and healing life path.

For the unskilled, intuition can seem like it’s just out of reach, intangible and unreal. But it’s really right here in the present in the felt senses of the body. You can learn to pay attention to your own intuition and make new choices of how to show up in your body and your life. You realize a clearer connection with your soul by turning towards your body’s wisdom. The body is the vehicle for intuition and for connection to everyone and everything.
Reach Out for Help

Bearing your pain alone can greatly increase your suffering by making you feel lonely, isolated, abandoned, powerless, and stuck. What you can’t easily face alone can be faced with support from other people. It’s more possible to face your pain when you have someone you can trust with you, holding a loving and supportive space for you to feel and witness it.

Telling people how you really feel requires vulnerability. Vulnerability facilitates connection and it opens a space for honesty and authenticity, which promotes trust and love. Believing and acting like we have to get through life all by ourselves, especially the hard parts, facilitates isolation and disconnection, and triggers fear. We can handle so much more by supporting each other than we can alone.

When we can connect with people who already have experience with what we’re struggling with, we can learn from their successes and failures. In this way we can gain valuable information and courage to get to a better place with it ourselves. Having a witness to what you are going through can give you the strength to stay in and explore difficult moments by moving through them rather than getting stuck in them or avoiding them.

Mind-Body Coaching

Reconnecting with your body and emotions and learning to allow rather than resist the physical sensations is one of the first steps in mind-body healing. Getting assistance from a mind-body coach can help you identify where you are getting stuck and help you come back faster to comfort and well-being. It can help you identify mind-body syndrome symptoms and help you step out of the syndrome so you get pain relief.

If you work with me I will help you reconnect with your body, emotions and soul, and to calm your mind, so that your symptoms improve and allow you to get on with living the life you want. I will teach you to relate to your body, emotions, mind, and soul in new ways, creating relief from underlying tension and healing pain.

If you want to explore working with me, please contact me for a free consultation. I meet over the phone or on Skype. Please email me at gailgkenny@gmail.com to set up an appointment.

The Secret to Healing Pelvic Pain Summary

1. Rule out any life-threatening illnesses.
2. Get physical therapy from a physical therapist trained in pelvic floor disorders to help your muscles relax.
3. You may need to pay out-of-pocket for effective treatment for pelvic pain.
4. Get familiar with TMS (Tension Myositis Syndrome) approaches to healing pain.
5. Get regular exercise. Your body is meant to move.
6. Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
7. Assemble a healing team which you’re in charge of.
8. It will take trial and error to find the multilevel healing approach that will work best for you.
9. Medication might be part of your multilevel approach to healing.
10. Do everything you can to calm your nervous system.
11. Be aware of your trauma triggers and learn how to reprogram your nervous system’s automatic responses.
13. Train your nervous system to rest more deeply through daily resting meditation and healthy sleep habits.
14. Understand emotions and turn towards feeling them rather than resisting them.
15. Take charge of your mind.
16. Cultivate your spiritual connection.
17. Learn to connect with and trust your intuition.
18. Ask for help.

**Recommended Books**

- *The Mindbody Prescription – Healing the Body, Healing the Pain* by John E. Sarno, M.D.
- *The Great Pain Deception*, by Steve Ozanich
- *The Trigger Point Therapy Workbook*, by Clair Davies
- *A Headache in the Pelvis* by David Wise
- *Healing Painful Sex*, by Deborah Coady
- *Ending Female Pain, A Woman’s Manual* by Isa Herrera
- *Heal Pelvic Pain*, by Amy Stein
- *The Language of Emotions*, by Karla McLaren
- *The Open-Focus Brain* by Les Fehmi, PhD, and Jim Robbins
- *Loving What Is* by Byron Katie
- *Healing Trauma* by Peter Levine
- *Self-Compassion* by Kristin Neff

**Appendix – Common Mind-Body Syndrome Diagnoses**

Chronic pelvic pain syndrome
Interstitial cystitis
Painful bladder syndrome
Irritable bladder syndrome
Irritable bowel syndrome
Pelvic floor dysfunction
Pudendal nerve pain
Endometriosis
Vulvodynia
Chronic Vaginal Yeast Infections (Candidiasis)
Myofascial Pain
Chronic Myofascial Pain Syndrome
Fibromyalgia
Sexual Pain
Vulvovaginitis
Vulvar Pain
Chronic lower back pain
Depression

About Gail Kenny

I’m an endorsed Mind-Body Coach, Certified Martha Beck Life Coach and trained psychic. I struggled with chronic pelvic pain for more than 20 years. Mind-body coaching was the last thing I needed to truly get my life back. Learn more about me and what I offer at gailkennylifecoach.com.