



What is Pelvic Congestion Syndrome?

Pelvic Congestion Syndrome (PCS) is a chronic condition caused by enlarged or refluxing veins in the pelvis (the lower part of the abdomen), similar to varicose veins. These veins become stretched and twisted, and the valves do not work properly, allowing blood to flow backwards and collect in the veins. This can lead to ongoing pelvic pain, often described as a dull or heavy ache. Symptoms may worsen with prolonged standing and, for some people, around pregnancy or menstruation. PCS most commonly affects women of reproductive age. It can sometimes be difficult to diagnose because its symptoms overlap with other causes of pelvic pain. Not all dilated pelvic veins cause symptoms, and treatment is guided primarily by how your symptoms affect your quality of life, together with imaging findings.



You are not alone.

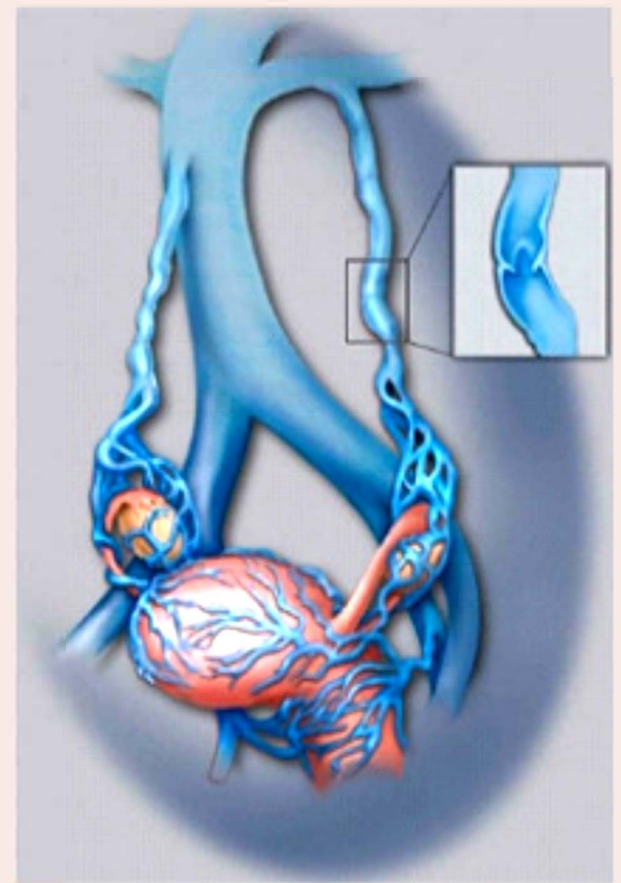
Pelvic Congestion Syndrome can be difficult to live with.

Support and effective treatment options are available.

Contact your
healthcare team



This leaflet provides general information only and does not replace individual medical advice. Please speak with your doctor, radiologist, or specialist nurse about your care.



Guide to Pelvic Congestion Syndrome (PCS)

Information for patients with chronic pelvic pain.

Understanding your symptoms and treatment options.

Common Symptoms

Chronic Pelvic Pain

A dull, aching pain in the lower abdomen that lasts more than six months and may worsen with standing or sitting for long periods.

Pain During Intercourse

Discomfort or significant pain felt during or after sexual intercourse is a common symptom of PCS.

Feeling of Fullness

A persistent sensation of pressure, heaviness, or bloating in the pelvic region.

Visible Varicose Veins

Enlarged veins may become visible on the thighs, buttocks, or around the vulva and vagina.



How PCS is Diagnosed

Assessment usually begins with a discussion about your symptoms, followed by imaging tests.

An ultrasound scan, often performed internally (transvaginal ultrasound), is usually the first test. This can show enlarged pelvic veins and assess how blood is flowing through them.

In some cases, further scans such as MRI or CT may be recommended to provide more detailed images and to rule out other possible causes of pelvic pain.

Occasionally, a venogram (a specialised X-ray test of the veins) is performed. This allows the pelvic veins to be seen in detail and may be carried out when planning treatment.

Treatment Options for Pelvic Congestion Syndrome

Treatment for Pelvic Congestion Syndrome is tailored to your symptoms and usually follows a stepwise approach. Not all patients require intervention.

Conservative and medical management may be appropriate for mild or intermittent symptoms and can include:

- Pain relief such as simple analgesics or anti-inflammatory medications
- Hormonal treatments to help reduce pelvic venous congestion
- Lifestyle measures, including gentle exercise, pacing activities, weight management, and avoiding prolonged standing

These approaches are often helpful in managing symptoms.

If symptoms persist or significantly affect your quality of life despite these measures, minimally invasive procedures such as pelvic vein embolisation may be considered. Your healthcare team will discuss whether this is appropriate for you.

In selected cases where other treatments are not suitable or have not been effective, surgical options may be discussed, although this is less common.

What is Pelvic Vein Embolisation?

Pelvic vein embolisation is a minimally invasive treatment performed by an Interventional Radiologist. It may be considered for patients with persistent or significant symptoms of Pelvic Congestion Syndrome when conservative measures have not provided sufficient relief.

During embolisation, a small catheter (a thin flexible tube placed into a vein) is guided to the affected pelvic veins using imaging. The abnormal veins are then sealed using small medical devices or special solutions to reduce abnormal blood flow and pressure within the veins.

This aims to improve symptoms and quality of life. Recovery is usually quick, and symptom improvement is often gradual over weeks to months.

Benefits of Pelvic Vein Embolisation

- Significant improvement in pelvic pain for most patients
- Minimally invasive treatment (no surgical incisions)
- Short recovery time
- Does not usually affect fertility
- Uterus and ovaries are preserved

Possible risks and Side Effects of Pelvic Vein Embolisation

Pelvic vein embolisation is generally very safe. Possible risks include:

- Temporary pelvic pain or cramping
- Bruising at the access site
- Infection or bleeding (uncommon)
- Migration of embolisation material (very rare)

Your interventional radiologist will discuss the potential benefits and risks with you in detail before any procedure.

What happens on the day?

1 Before the procedure

You will attend hospital on the day of the procedure. This is usually a day-case procedure, meaning most patients go home the same day.

The healthcare team will explain what to expect, including the use of local anaesthetic and, if needed, light sedation, and answer any questions.

2 During the procedure

A small catheter (a thin flexible tube placed into a vein) is guided through a vein (usually in the groin, arm, or neck) to the affected pelvic veins using X-ray imaging.

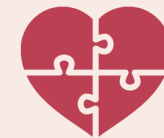
The abnormal veins are then sealed using tiny coils, plugs, or medical glue. The procedure usually takes around 1–2 hours, and you will be awake but comfortable throughout.

3 After the procedure

You will rest briefly after the procedure, and most patients can eat, drink, and walk later the same day. You may go home the same day or the following day.

Mild discomfort is common and usually managed with simple pain relief; you will be given advice and contact details before going home.

Recovery and follow-up



Some pelvic discomfort or cramping for a few days after the procedure is normal and does not mean the treatment has not worked. For some people, this discomfort can last a little longer.

Symptom improvement is often gradual and may continue over several weeks to months rather than being immediate.

Most patients can return to light activities within a few days, following advice from their healthcare team. You will be given discharge advice before going home.

Follow-up may be arranged to assess symptom improvement, review imaging if required, and provide ongoing support and advice. You should contact your healthcare team if you have any concerns.

Why might I be referred to Interventional Radiology?

Interventional Radiology provides image-guided, minimally invasive treatments that can help manage Pelvic Congestion Syndrome while avoiding major surgery.

You may be referred if symptoms persist despite conservative treatment and imaging findings support the diagnosis, to discuss whether pelvic vein embolisation may be appropriate for you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will this affect my fertility?

Pelvic vein embolisation does not usually affect fertility. Many patients go on to have successful pregnancies after treatment. If you are planning a pregnancy, this should be discussed individually with your healthcare team so that your care can be tailored to you.

When will I notice improvement?

Some people notice improvement within weeks, while for others symptoms improve more gradually over several weeks to months. Everyone's recovery is different. Most people are able to return to light activities within days, gradually increasing activity as advised by their healthcare team.

Can symptoms come back?

Most patients experience lasting improvement in their symptoms. In a small number of cases, symptoms may return and further assessment may be needed.

Can I return to work and exercise?

Most people can return to light activities and work within a few days. Exercise can usually be increased gradually as you feel able, following advice from your healthcare team.



When to Contact Your Healthcare Team

Please contact your healthcare team if you experience any of the following after your procedure:

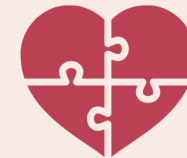
- Increasing pain that is not controlled with the medication you were advised to take
- Fever, redness, swelling, or discharge at the puncture site
- Any concerns or questions about your recovery after discharge

If you are worried about your symptoms at any time, it is always appropriate to seek medical advice.

Key Points to Remember

Pelvic Congestion Syndrome is a recognised and treatable cause of pelvic pain. Treatment is guided by your symptoms and imaging findings. For suitable patients, pelvic vein embolisation is a safe and effective procedure designed to improve symptoms and quality of life. Most patients recover quickly, and fertility is usually preserved.

Living Well with PCS



Pelvic Congestion Syndrome can affect daily activities and quality of life. Your healthcare team can work with you to manage symptoms and discuss appropriate treatment options.

If your symptoms are affecting your mood or emotional wellbeing, please speak with your GP or healthcare team for advice and support.