Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is caused by infections which enter the body through the cervix and work their way up into the pelvic cavity. It can range from a mild infection to a serious disorder. The bacteria which cause the sexually transmitted infections, chlamydia and gonorrhoea, are thought to be chiefly responsible for PID, although other bacteria may play a part.

Women – know your body
1. Vagina
2. Clitoris
3. Cervix
4. Womb
5. Urethra
6. Anus
7. Fallopian tube

Signs and symptoms
The symptoms of PID can vary in different women and this makes it difficult for doctors to diagnose it. It can be an acute (sudden and severe) or a chronic (long-term) infection.

The most common symptom of acute PID is:
- severe abdominal pain

Other symptoms may include:
- a high temperature
- nausea
- vaginal discharge
- fast pulse
- pain or discomfort during sex
Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)

The most common symptoms of chronic PID are:
- constant abdominal pain or discomfort
- weakness and tiredness
- very heavy, painful periods
- pain or discomfort during sex
- intermenstrual bleeding
Sometimes PID can be almost or entirely symptomless.

How PID develops
The infections which cause PID may get into the pelvic cavity when:
- an infection is not treated or is not treated promptly
- the cervix is dilated (opened) during childbirth, miscarriage or an abortion
- an intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) is inserted

If PID is not identified and treated it may scar the fallopian tubes – the tubes along which an egg passes to get to the womb. This can cause infertility. It will also increase the risk of an ectopic pregnancy (when the fertilised egg begins to grow in the fallopian tube or outside it, rather than in the womb). Once the tubes are scarred, reinfection will cause more damage, even after the original infection has been treated.

Where to go for help
If you have severe pain you should see your GP as soon as possible or go to the casualty department of your local hospital.

If you start to experience any persistent pelvic pain or discomfort (other than your usual period symptoms) you should either go to:
- your own GP
- a doctor at a well-woman clinic, or
- your local NHS sexual health (GUM) clinic. You can find details of your nearest NHS sexual health clinic in the phone book under genito-urinary medicine (GUM), sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or venereal diseases (VD). Or phone your local hospital and ask for the 'special' or GUM clinic. You will get free, confidential advice and treatment. You can go to any clinic anywhere in the country – you don’t have to go to a local one – and you don’t have to be referred by your GP. (Non-NHS sexual health clinics may not always offer the full range of services which are available at NHS sexual health clinics.)
Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)

This factsheet is one of a series which give information on the following range of infections and diseases: bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, cystitis, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis (A, B and C), non-specific urethritis, penile cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), prostate cancer, pubic lice, scabies, syphilis, testicular cancer, thrush and trichomonas vaginalis.

Free copies of any of these factsheets are available from GP surgeries, NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics, or your local health promotion unit (in the phone book under your local Health Authority).

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