Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID): Myths & Misconceptions

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

| March 1, 2021, 6:28 CST

Understanding the facts about PID helps women make better decisions for its prevention and cure.

The movement of microorganisms from the cervix to the upper genital tract can result in a clinical syndrome commonly referred to as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which causes infection and swelling of the female reproductive organs. In the United States, PID is usually caused by a severe complication of the most infectious sexually transmitted diseases reported: chlamydia and gonorrhea (and also other sexually transmitted infections).
Pelvic inflammatory disease is so common in the U.S. that approximately 1 million women are infected annually. Myths and misconceptions surround PID and knowing the most common ones is important. Read on as we debunk them.

**Myth: PID is caused only by STDs.**

**Reality:** Even though sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) cause most pelvic inflammatory disease infections, approximately 10 percent of PID infections are transmitted in the absence of STD bacteria.

Non-sexually transmitted PID may happen as a result of:

- Septic abortions.
- Use of unconventionally sterilized tools during medical termination of pregnancies.
- Use of an improperly sterilized curette to remove the endometrium through the cervix.
- Ruptures in the lower abdominal cavity that lead to the spread of abscesses to the uterus.
- Other types of bacteria that are not sexually transmitted but can cause PID, such as klebsiella, clostridia, Bacteroides, E. coli, actinomyces, fusobacteria and staphylococcus.

Women can also increase their chances of developing pelvic inflammatory disease in any of the following ways:

- They engage in unprotected sexual activities (especially for women under the age of 25), have multiple sexual partners or are in a sexual relationship with a partner who has multiple sexual partners.
- They frequently flush their vagina with water or other fluids, especially douche, which can cause an imbalance of vaginal bacteria.
They have a history of STDs and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

They douche, use an intrauterine device (IUD) or use a tampon before the end of the medically recommended healing period after childbirth or abortion. (Six weeks is preferred for pelvic rest after childbirth; two weeks is acceptable following abortion or miscarriage.)

The use of a long-term birth control device inserted in the female reproductive organ, such as an IUD, does not cause pelvic inflammatory disease but can increase the chances of contracting PID when other factors are involved.

**Myth: PID is a minor issue.**

**Reality:** Pelvic inflammatory disease is not a minor issue, especially as it most often starts with an STD, which should receive treatment as early as possible. If PID is left untreated for several months, it can quickly spread to other parts of the body and cause chronic pelvic pain as well as complications such as scarring in muscle tissue. It can also destroy the female reproductive organs and cause infertility.

For a woman to detect pelvic inflammatory disease as early as possible, she must know the symptoms of the disease, the most common of which include:

- A high fever, but without the chills
- Mild to severe pain in the lower abdomen
- Bleeding of the uterus during or after intercourse and between menstrual cycles
- Mild to severe pain during sex and urination
- Heavy and extremely smelly vaginal discharge
- Nausea and vomiting

**Myth: If I’m still a virgin, I can’t get PID.**

**Reality:** PID can affect all women, no matter their sexual activities. In other words, women who are virgins are still at risk of contracting PID, although it is rare. Most PID cases are due to STDs and STIs, but given that not all cases stem from sexual activity, women need to take precautions such as visiting a doctor for a pelvic exam if they experience pain in their lower abdomen or any other PID symptoms.

**Myth: PID is untreatable.**

**Reality:** Pelvic inflammatory disease is treatable if diagnosed early enough, but it can leave irreversible scarring and damage to the fallopian tubes and the whole reproductive system. The earlier this disease can be diagnosed and treatment has begun, the higher your chance of making a recovery. PID may make it difficult for a woman to get pregnant both during and after the ailment period. PID also increases the chance for tubal pregnancies due to the
scarring of the tubes. But this doesn’t mean pregnancy is impossible. Some women manage to conceive and deliver healthy babies even after suffering pelvic inflammatory disease. Early detection and early treatment are key.

PID

myths & misconceptions

STDs/STIs

reproductive health

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