

# Chronic vulvar pain related to irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia and interstitial cystitis

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Millions of women suffer from unexplained vulvar pain so severe it can make intercourse, exercise and even sitting unbearable.

New research now shows that women with this painful vaginal condition known as vulvodynia are two to three times more likely to also have one or more other chronic pain conditions, including [irritable bowel syndrome](#), [fibromyalgia](#) (musculoskeletal pain) and interstitial [cystitis](#) ([bladder pain](#)).

These increasingly prevalent chronic pain conditions are known to be underdiagnosed – and the new data sheds more light on how they may also be related, according the University of Michigan Health System study that was published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

"Millions of people in the U.S. have chronic pain. This report stresses the need to further study relationships between these types of disorders to help understand common patterns and shared features," says lead author Barbara D. Reed, M.D., M.S.P.H., professor of family medicine at the U-M Medical School.

"Chronic pain conditions like these can seriously hamper quality of life and it's imperative that we understand the commonality among them. Results we see in any studies related to one of the conditions, such as regarding etiology, physiology, or treatment, may be relevant to any of

others."

Other studies show that [chronic pain conditions](#) are much more prevalent than previously estimated, and there has been growing interest in understanding the patterns of co-occurrence, Reed says.

"Women who have these disorders often see physicians but are not given a diagnosis or are given an erroneous diagnosis and continue to suffer without being treated properly," Reed says. "Until their symptoms have a name, it can be really discouraging because patients begin thinking it's all in their head.

"[Chronic pain](#) is starting to get a lot more attention, with more research being done on all of these disorders, as well as combinations of these disorders. I think the identification and treatment of these conditions will continue to improve."

Authors used data from the six-month follow-up survey of the Michigan Woman to Woman study, a population-based cohort of 2,500 adult women in southeast Michigan. An original study found that more than 25 percent of surveyed women in the metro Detroit area have experienced ongoing vulvar pain at some point in their lives but only 2 percent ever sought treatment for their pain.

**More information:** "Relationship Between Vulvodynia and Chronic Comorbid Pain Conditions:" [doi: 10.1097/AOG.0b013e31825957cf](https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0b013e31825957cf)

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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