



# MID-CHARLOTTE DERMATOLOGY

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## **Penodynia/Scrotodynia**

Penodynia is defined as sensations of penile discomfort, including irritation, abnormal sensations, burning, uncomfortable sex, stinging, soreness, or discomfort that has been present for at least 6 months, when there is no infection or skin disease causing the discomfort.

Scrotodynia is less common, and occurs when the scrotum is affected. Patients with penodynia often find that redness, swelling, and texture changes of the skin occur, but this does not indicate primary skin disease, but rather can be a result of neuropathic pain.

As best as we know at this time, penodynia/scrotodynia is a symptom most often caused by several problems occurring at the same time. First is abnormalities of the pelvic floor muscles, those muscles a person uses to stop urinating mid-stream. These muscles are supposed to be very relaxed, but strong. However, some people have tenseness and irritability of these muscles, although the muscles are overall weak. An abnormal pelvic floor often leads to symptoms of constipation, diarrhea, cramping, frequent urination, or burning with urination.

Second is nerve discomfort (also called neuropathic discomfort, neuritis, neuralgia.) People with pelvic floor abnormalities are at risk for the development of neuropathic discomfort, which is often set off by any irritation or injury, such as an infection or zipper burn. How pelvic floor abnormalities cause neuropathic discomfort is not understood.

Third, anxiety and depression are always factors in genital discomfort. Depression regularly worsens discomfort of any kind, and anxiety increases the tenseness of the pelvic floor muscles and intensifies discomfort. In addition, fear of sexually transmitted disease, malignancy, and infertility worsen symptoms and tend to make those with genital discomfort focus on this condition.

Penodynia is never associated with dangerous illness. Penodynia is not caused by sexually transmitted diseases, cancer, diabetes, or other dangerous conditions. Penodynia is not associated with infertility. However, the effects of the discomfort of penodynia produce seriously interfere with normal activities of daily life, and disrupt enjoyment of life and relationships.

There is no cure for penodynia, but there are treatments that make the discomfort much better. The goal for the treatment of penodynia is to relieve discomfort so that daily activities, including sexual activity, exercise, and sitting are comfortable.

Treatment begins with the avoidance of irritation. These include irritating medications, moisturizers and some lubricants, over-washing, contraceptive jelly, irritating condom, or any other activity or substance that can irritate the skin.

A first-line therapy for penodynia targets pelvic floor muscle abnormalities with a pelvic floor evaluation and physical therapy. This strengthens the pelvic floor muscles while retraining them to relax.

Also important are medications for neuropathic discomfort. These include tricyclic medications (amitriptyline, desipramine, imipramine), gabapentin (Neurontin<sup>R</sup>), pregabalin (Lyrica<sup>R</sup>), venlafaxine (Effexor<sup>R</sup>), and duloxetine (Cymbalta<sup>R</sup>). These are medications that were originally developed for depression or seizures, but have been discovered to alleviate neuropathic discomfort. These are not discomfort medications that immediately produce short-term relief, but rather help to regulate the nerve discomfort long-term. Normally, the medications are begun at very low doses and gradually increased, especially since patients with penodynia are often very sensitive to medications.

Some health care providers use topical medications as well, including topical lidocaine, gabapentin, or amitriptyline/baclofen combination. There is much less experience with these as a means of clearing penodynia.

Many people find that, after a long period of discomfort with sexual activity, re-establishing comfortable and fun sexual activity is difficult. Fear and the psychological effects of this chronic genital discomfort very often require counseling, to include couple counseling.

With proper therapy, the discomfort of penodynia usually is controlled and men are able to lead a normal life.