

Why Are Women More Sensitive to Pain than Men?



Discounting childbirth and pain resulting from catastrophic injuries, **medical researchers believe there is a real gender difference when it comes to pain.**

Unfortunately there is a **lack of sufficient female pain studies** and an understanding of which pain generating conditions women are most prone to experience. Such information is currently not available to provide better guidelines for providing gender specific pain medications.

What researchers do know is that women

- report more pain than men
- more likely to describe their pain as more intense than men
- at greater risk for developing chronic pain conditions
- associate their pain sensitivity to migraine headaches, menstruation and back pain
- pain sensitivity appears to be biologically related to inherited conditions and hormone levels based on study results with identical and fraternal twins

Another study measured pain sensitivity in an experiment where 25 females and 25 males were tested with an induced pain experience. When subjects' fingers were exposed to an irritating agent, the central processing of pain showed greater activity in females than males.

Another possible difference is based on **the effects of morphine** on the spinal cord and brains of males and females. Based on animal studies females require twice as much morphine

for pain relief and appear to have less opioid receptors than males.

Also, **there is a distinct brain difference**. The female brain records pain sensations in the right amygdala with neural connections to more internal brain functions. Male brains, on the other hand, record their pain sensations in the left amygdala with neural connections to the external environment.

From a psychosocial perspective, other reasons suggested for female sensitivity to pain include –

- greater susceptibility to depression and anxiety which is associated with more intense pain sensations
- greater susceptibility to threatening conditions which exacerbates pain sensitivity
- greater self awareness and monitoring of pain which in turn heightens sensitivity

It seems pain research has overly relied on pain treatments using males subjects thinking the results apply equally to females. Well, now that they know there is a difference it would be nice if they hurried up and found something that worked better for us.

Maybe we could say some nights that we don't have a headache.

by Joyce Hansen