

Women outrank men when it comes to pain

When it comes to pain, there are acknowledged differences between women and men.

What clinical practitioners and researchers know is that women report pain more often and report pain of a greater intensity than men. Women with chronic pain (pain lasting more than 6 months with no discernable relief from treatment), experience it **more often**, for **longer duration** and with **greater intensity**. Women also exhibit a lower tolerance for pain, as well as, lower pain threshold level.

Other notable difference may include:

- experiencing multiple pain conditions leading to related psychological stress and disability
- connecting more emotionally than physically to pain
- encountering different side effects from analgesics

While these differences are apparent, researchers are considering a number of **other possibilities** such as ...

- Smaller body size
- Hormone fluctuations over a lifetime
- Available access to treatment
- Interaction with treatment practitioner
- Treatment protocol based on drugs primarily tested on men

One of the questions also raised is do women really feel more pain or do they just report more pain. In trying to understand pain and how it affects women, researchers are looking for a more objective indicator of pain. The primary problem is that pain is assessed on self report, using a scale of 1-10 to indicate level of pain. However, the self report scale is not

always consistent and reliable as an indicator of intensity, but is helpful in determining if medication or treatment has been effective.

Stanford School of Medicine is looking for some form of biomarker as a pain indicator. Using electronic medical records shows women report more pain across a range of diseases and in some areas not previously viewed as gender differences (read more about electronic medical records).

Cognitive neuroscientist, Dr Flavia Mancini, at the University College London is using brain image pain mapping as an indicator. Brain imaging could correlate location and intensity of pain. It's suggested that besides enhancing pain treatment and determining drug effectiveness, it would also indicate if women really experience more pain than men. (read more about brain image pain mapping).

Sources:

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