

Women's chronic pain is more complex, more severe

24 October 2013

(Medical Xpress)—New research from the University of Adelaide has found that chronic pain in women is more complex and harder to treat than chronic pain in men.

The work, to be presented tomorrow at the Faculty of Pain Medicine spring meeting in Byron Bay, organised by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA), suggest that [men](#) and women should be prescribed medications and treated for [pain](#) differently according to their gender.

Study leader Dr Mark Hutchinson from the University's School of Medical Sciences says laboratory studies have shown for the first time that the brain's immune cells, known as glial cells, contribute to differences in pain between the sexes.

"There are fundamental differences in the experience of pain between females and males," says Dr Hutchinson, whose research has been investigating why [acute pain](#) turns to [chronic pain](#) (experienced for at least three months consecutively) in some people and why chronic pain is more prevalent in women than in men.

"Our research is discovering brain mechanisms at work that are proving chronic pain in women is more complex and difficult to treat than in men, despite the similarity of the initial cause of pain.

"Female and male structures in the brain are different but that doesn't explain women's higher rate of pain. There are multiple different pain systems in females and males," he says.

"Our studies certainly show that women's experience of pain is more severe and the pain is harder to treat." Dr Hutchinson says it's already known that some drugs for [inflammatory bowel disease](#) only work on [women](#) and not on men, indicating the need for more tailored treatments.

"Better understanding female chronic pain is extremely important to treatment. We're hoping our research will lead to the development of sex-targeted drugs that will provide more effective pain relief," he says.

This research has been funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Provided by University of Adelaide

APA citation: Women's chronic pain is more complex, more severe (2013, October 24) retrieved 2 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-women-chronic-pain-complex-severe.html>

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