

REAL TALK

Medical Gaslighting: How to Spot It and Get Help

This Women's Health Week, we're putting the spotlight on a silent issue that affects far too many of us: **medical gaslighting**.

It's time to start recognising the signs, learn how to advocate for yourself, and know where to get support.

- **What is Medical Gaslighting?**

Medical gaslighting happens when healthcare providers **dismiss, downplay, or invalidate your medical concerns** — and it disproportionately impacts women and people assigned female at birth (AFAB).

It often stems from biases, assumptions, or outdated ideas like “I know your body better than you do.”

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Why Medical Gaslighting Matters

Medical gaslighting isn't just frustrating — it can have **real, lasting impacts** on your health and wellbeing:

- **Delayed diagnosis**

Missing the right diagnosis (like with endometriosis) can mean living with pain longer or missing a critical treatment window.

- **Self-doubt**

When your concerns are dismissed, it's easy to second-guess yourself and lose confidence in what your body is telling you.

- **Lower quality of life**

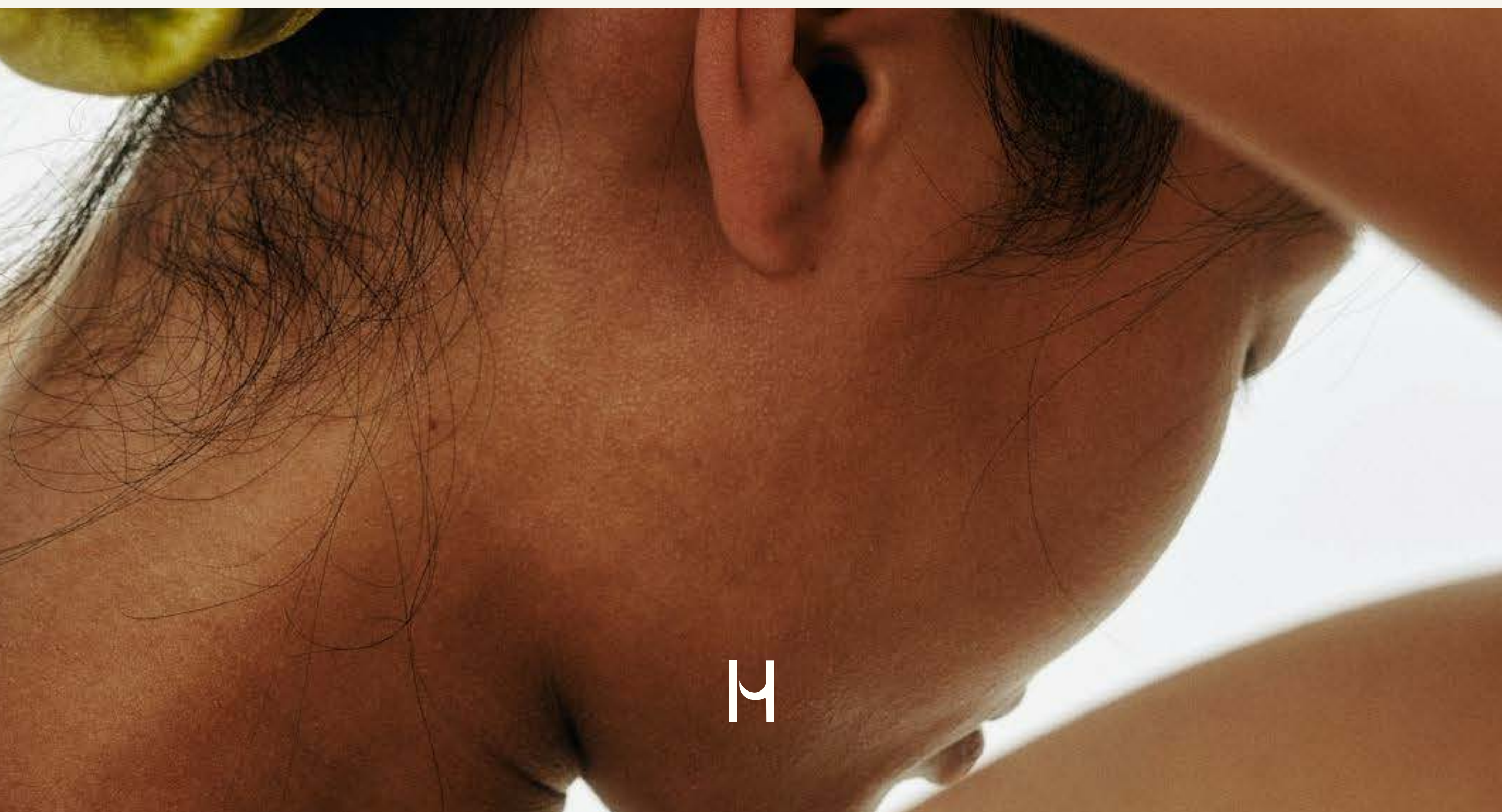
Untreated symptoms can affect work, relationships, and even everyday activities.

- **Feeling powerless**

You know something's wrong, but no one's listening — and that can be deeply distressing.

- **Loss of trust**

After being dismissed, it's common to feel wary of healthcare providers and the system itself.



What the stats show



1 in 3 women report having their health concerns dismissed by medical practitioners.



55% of women have felt their pain was underestimated or ignored.

33%

Women in ERs with abdominal pain waited **33% longer** than men with the same symptoms.



Doctors have been shown to **interrupt patients after 11 seconds on average.**



Women with **heart attacks** are more likely to have delayed diagnosis and treatment.



Women are **less likely to receive pain medication** for acute conditions like fractures, despite reporting higher pain scores.



Women presenting with **stroke** symptoms were more likely to be misdiagnosed than men, especially when presenting with atypical symptoms like headache or dizziness.

How to Spot Medical Gaslighting

Watch out for these patterns during appointments:

WHAT IT IS

01

- Dismissal or trivialisation of symptoms

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

“I’ve had this pelvic pain for months. It’s getting worse and affecting my daily life.”

“That’s pretty common. Lots of women get period pain — it’s normal.”

WHAT IT IS

02

- Invalidating emotions and experiences

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

“I’m worried because I’ve been feeling exhausted and dizzy every day.”

“I don't think it’s anything to worry about. Try to relax, and you’ll feel better.”

WHAT IT IS

03

- Attributing symptoms to anxiety or hormones

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

“I’ve been getting chest pain and shortness of breath.”

“Sounds like anxiety attacks. You should focus on stress management.”

- **Refusal to investigate or explore alternatives**

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

“I’ve had abdominal pain for months — could we run some more tests?”

“There’s no need. It’s probably just IBS. You’d just waste your time and money.”

- **Not listening or cutting patients off**

WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

“I’ve been tracking my migraines and I’ve noticed they’re worse after -----”

“We’ll prescribe something for the pain.”

How to Advocate for your Health

Here are steps you can take to advocate for your health:

- **Speak up**

Explain your symptoms and ask for clear answers.

- **Get a second opinion**

Another perspective can make all the difference.

- **Keep notes**

Track symptoms, tests, and conversations.

- **Bring support**

A friend or advocate can help you be heard.

- **Find your people**

Connect with patient groups for advice and encouragement.

- **Where to get help**

Suspecting medical gaslighting can feel isolating, but you don't have to face it on your own. There are trusted services, advocates, and communities available to help you be heard and get the care you deserve.

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