

Painful Sex

Do you experience pain during, after or immediately before sex?

This pain can be experienced in many different ways. The pain may be internal or external. It may be sharp, dull, burning, throbbing, shallow or deep.

- It is more common in women, but can affect people of any gender or sex.
- Affects 10-20% of people in the USA at some point in their lives

What will my provider do to figure out the cause?

- Ask questions like:
 - Where is the pain and what does it feel like?
 - When did you start experiencing the pain?
 - What brings your symptoms on or makes them worse? What makes you feel better?
- Ask you questions about your sexual history.
 - Some people feel uncomfortable answering questions about these topics, but it is important to remember that your provider is there to listen, not judge, and collect the necessary information to get you feeling better.
- Perform a physical exam, this may include a pelvic exam where the provider will need to look at your genitals. You are entitled to have someone else in the room with you in addition to the provider, if that makes you more comfortable.
- They may make sure you don't have an infection causing the pain. Depending on the test, the provider may collect a swab, urine, or blood sample.

Causes

- Dryness, lack of lubrication
- Trauma (emotional or physical)
- Menopause/Low Estrogen which can lead to dryness and thinning of vaginal tissue
- Mental health/psychological struggles/relationship issues.
- Lack of desire/arousal
- Some infections
- Endometriosis
- Pelvic floor issues
- Something blocking an ejaculatory duct (people with penises)
- Skin problems in the genital area
- Myofascial pelvic pain syndrome
- Provoked vulvar pain syndrome
- Certain nerve and inflammatory disorders
- Changes in your anatomy that were there when you were born

What can be done about it?

- To do at home
 - Use water-based lubrication, which can be bought at any pharmacy. Painful sex is often caused by lack of natural lubrication.
 - Increasing time spent on foreplay may also help develop more natural lubrication
 - Take time to relax and destress before sex
 - Apply ice after painful sex
- Treat the cause
 - Medication/gels/ointments to address different causes of your symptoms (ex. estrogen cream, antibiotics, etc.)
- Counseling and talk therapy about any concerns you may have about having sex/being sexually active or about your pain
- Physical therapy to help certain muscles relax or to strengthen certain muscles
- You can ask questions! You can ask your doctor any questions or bring up any concerns you may have.
- You can talk to your partner about what you are experiencing. You and your partner may also come up with some ideas to help your situation or things to try.

