

Psychogenic Vaginismus and Dyspareunia

Vaginismus is a complex sexual disorder, because it is both a psychological and physical condition:

Vaginismus is rare and uncommon, occurring only in women. It can cause severe physical and psychological pain. It is an uncontrolled, involuntary contraction of the vagina muscles, ranging in severity. Vaginismus occurs when the muscles around the outer third of the vagina contract and tighten spontaneously when vaginal penetration is attempted during sexual intercourse. These contractions cause sexual intercourse to be painful.

Psychogenic vaginismus can occur under different circumstances. It can begin the first time vaginal penetration is attempted: known as the "lifelong vaginismus." Alternately, vaginismus can begin after a period of normal sexual functioning: known as the "acquired-type vaginismus." For some women, vaginal tightening occurs in all situations where vaginal penetration is attempted: known as the "generalized-type vaginismus". For other women, it occurs in only one or a few situations, such as during a gynecological examination at the doctor's office, or with a specific sex partner: known as the "situational-type vaginismus".

In order for a condition to be diagnosed as vaginismus, the response must be due to **psychological factors** or a combination of psychological and medical factors, but not to medical factors alone. While at times no cause can be found, there are many possible causes of vaginismus:

- A strict upbringing in which sex was considered wrong or sinful.
- A familial interaction highlighted by a domineering and threatening father, with high levels of conflict, verbal and/or physical abuse in their parental marriages.
- A traumatic childhood experience, such as sexual molestation; acquired-type vaginismus is often the result of sexual assault or rape.
- Concerns that penetration is going to be painful, particularly during the first sexual experience.
- Women who feel threatened or powerless in their relationship may subconsciously use this tightening of the vaginal muscles as a defense or silent objection to the relationship.
- Sexual inhibition, fear of pregnancy, memory of previous pain due to infection, surgery, or other gynecologic conditions, and others.

Vaginismus is generally considered to be the most treatable sexual disorder. Psychogenic vaginismus is a condition that must be followed by a psychologist and a gynecologist. Various treatment methods and exercises can pave the way into recovery.

A woman who has vaginismus, *often* also has dyspareunia. Even though vaginismus shares some similar aspects with dyspareunia, dyspareunia is much more common. It is a symptom of an underlying physical or psychological disorder. Dyspareunia sufferers are mostly women; it happens only in small number of men. Dyspareunia in men is rare and is almost caused by a medical problem.

Dyspareunia is a medical term used to describe any abnormal pain experienced any time before, during, or following sexual intercourse. The pain may be located in the genitals or within the pelvis. It is not unusual for women occasionally to experience pain during intercourse. This is not true dyspareunia (about 15% of women may have pain with intercourse at some point in their lives; about 1–2% have true dyspareunia). Dyspareunia distracts women from excitement and pleasure feeling. Sometimes in certain cases, after the original source of pain disappeared, dyspareunia sufferer might feel pain because they expect pain.

Dyspareunia can occur under different circumstances and due to several causes. It can be classified from the moment elapsed once the sufferer first felt the pain, identifies within two types. “Lifelong or primary dyspareunia” means that the condition has been present for the entire sexual life of the affected person. “Acquired or secondary dyspareunia” begins after a period of normal sexual function. Dyspareunia’s psychosocial causes are similar to vaginismus’s including:

- Prior sexual trauma.
- Guilt, anxiety, or tension about sex.
- Prior physical trauma to the vaginal area.
- Depression or anxiety in general.
- Problems in a relationship.

Any of these factors may cause painful sex. The affected person may then associate pain with sex and find it even harder to relax and become aroused in future intercourses. With treatment, the chance of overcoming dyspareunia and having an enjoyable sexual life is good.

Treatment of dyspareunia is a psychological and medical one, including counseling, sex therapy, and muscle relaxing medications.

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