

When Sexual Intercourse is Painful ...

Vaginismus is a female sexual disorder. It is an uncontrolled, reflexive contraction of the vaginal muscles due to a psychological cause.

Vaginismus is rare and uncommon, occurring only in women. The main problem of Vaginismus is that it prevents normal sexual intercourse from happening. During intercourse, penetration is not possible because the vagina automatically contracts and blocks the entry of the male sex organ. This reaction of the vagina is a reflex and is non-voluntary. It's not very clear what the basis of such an automatic reaction is, but studies point to a psychological factor. This is why it is referred to as "Psychogenic Vaginismus"

Psychogenic vaginismus can happen the first time during the first sexual intercourse ever, usually due to a painful penetration. The first sexual intercourse is known to cause discomfort to females, sometimes painful. In this case, the woman becomes conditioned to believe that every following intercourse will also be painful and hence will get this reflexive contraction of the muscles of the vagina as a protective mechanism. Alternately, vaginismus can begin after a period of normal sexual functioning. For other women, vaginismus occurs with one sexual partner but not another.

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 psychological risk factors for vaginismus:

- A strict upbringing in which sex was considered wrong or sinful.
- A familial interaction highlighted by a domineering and threatening father
- A traumatic childhood experience, such as sexual molestation
- Secondary to sexual assault or rape.
- Concerns that penetration is going to be painful, particularly during the first sexual experience: Anticipatory Anxiety.
- 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 easily treatable. 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.

Even though vaginismus shares some similar aspects with dyspareunia, dyspareunia is much more common. Dyspareunia is the feeling of pain in the genital organ of either males or females during sexual intercourse. Most sufferers are women; it happens only in small number of men. Dyspareunia in men is rare and is almost caused by a medical problem.

Dyspareunia is any abnormal pain experienced any time during, or following sexual intercourse. The pain may be located in the genitals or within the pelvis. 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.

If a physical exam is performed by a gynecologist and no medical reason was discovered, Dyspareunia can then be psychogenic (psychological in nature).

Dyspareunia's psychological risk factors include:

- A strict upbringing in which sex was considered wrong or sinful.
- Prior sexual trauma which caused physical trauma to the vagina
- Guilt, anxiety, or tension about sex
- Depression or anxiety in general
- Problems in a relationship

People who suffer from painful sexual relationships due to psychological factors usually suffer from anxiety, panic attacks or OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). Treatment of dyspareunia is a psychological and medical one, including counseling, sex therapy, and muscle relaxing medications.

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