Dyspareunia, Painful Intercourse

Dyspareunia is pain caused during sexual intercourse. It is most common in women, but it also happens in men. It is important to tell your caregiver when your pain started, the location of the pain, the type of pain, and when during intercourse it occurs. This helps diagnose and treat the problem.

FEMALE CAUSES

The pain from this condition is usually felt when anything is put into the vagina. Even sitting or wearing pants can cause pain. Any part of the genitals can cause pain during sex. **Some causes of pain during intercourse are:**

- Infections of the skin around the vagina.
- Vaginal infections, yeast, bacteria, or virus infection.
- Vaginismus is a spasm of the muscles around the vagina. The spasm narrows and tightens the vagina and causes pain. The pain of the spasms can be so severe that intercourse is impossible.
- Allergic reaction from sperimicides, condoms, scented tampons, soaps, douches, and vaginal sprays.
- Cyst (*closed sac*) on the Bartholin or skene glands, located at the opening of the vagina.
- Scar tissue in the vagina, from an episiotomy (*surgically enlarged opening*), or tearing after delivering a baby.
- Vaginal dryness. This is more common in menopause. The normal secretions of the vagina are decreased. Changes in estrogen levels and increased difficulty becoming aroused can cause painful sex.
- Lack of foreplay, to lubricate the vagina, can cause vaginal dryness.
- Noncancerous tumors (*fibroids*) in the uterus.
- Endometriosis (*uterus lining tissue growing outside the uterus*).
- Tubal pregnancy (*pregnancy that starts in the fallopian tube*).
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding your baby can cause vaginal dryness.
- A tilting or prolapse of the uterus. Prolapse is when weak and stretched muscles around the uterus allow it to fall into the vagina.
- Problems with the ovaries, cyst, or scar tissue. This may be worse with certain sexual positions.
- Previous surgeries causing adhesions or scar tissue, in the vagina or pelvis.
- Bladder and intestinal problems.
- Psychological problems may cause pain.
- Negative attitudes about sex, experiencing rape, sexual assault, and misinformation about sex are often related to some types of pain.
- Previous pelvic infection, causing scar tissue in the pelvis and on the female organs.
- Cyst or tumor on the ovary.
- Cancer of the female organs.
- Certain medicines may be responsible.
- Medical problems, diabetes, arthritis, thyroid disease.
- Sometimes a cause cannot be found.

MALE CAUSES

In men, there are many physical causes of sexual discomfort. **Some causes of pain during intercourse are:**

- Infections of the prostate, bladder, or seminal vesicles can cause pain after ejaculation.
- Men suffering from interstitial cystitis (*inflamed bladder*) may have pain from ejaculation.
- Gonorrheal infections may cause pain during ejaculation.
- Urethritis (*inflamed urethra*) or prostatitis (*inflamed prostate*) can make genital stimulation painful or uncomfortable.
- Deformities of the penis, such as Peyronie's disease, may cause pain during intercourse.
- A tight foreskin may be a cause of pain.
- Cancer of the male organs.

- Psychological problems are also a cause of pain.

DIAGNOSIS

- Your caregiver will take a history and have you describe where the pain is located (outside the vagina, in the vagina, in the pelvis).
- Following this, your caregiver will do a physical exam.
- **For females,** let your caregiver know if the exam is too painful.
- During the final part of the exam, your doctor will feel your uterus and ovaries with one hand on the abdomen and one finger in your vagina. This is a pelvic exam.
- Blood tests, Pap test, cultures for infection, ultrasound test, and X-rays may be done. You may need to see a specialist for female problems (*gynecologist*).
- Your caregiver may do a laparoscopy (*looking into the pelvis with a lighted tube, through an incision in the abdomen*), CT Scan, or MRI.

TREATMENT

Your caregiver can help you determine the best course of treatment. Sometimes more testing is done. Continue with the suggested testing, until your caregiver feels sure about your diagnosis and how to treat it. Continue with a caregiver until you are satisfied that the reason for the pain has been found. Be sure that you know what to do about it. Sometimes it is difficult to find the reason for the pain. The search for the cause can be frustrating.

The treatment depends on the cause of the pain. Treatment may include:

- Medicines such as antibiotics, vaginal or skin creams, hormones, or antidepressants.
- You may need minor or major surgery.
- Psychological counseling or group therapy may be needed.
- Kegel exercises and vaginal dilators, to help certain cases of vaginismus (*spasms*).
- Apply lubrication as recommended by your caregiver, if you have dryness.
- Seek counseling, if treatment does not help.
- Sex therapy for you and your sex partner may be necessary.

It is common for the pain to continue after the reason for the pain has been treated. Some reasons for this include a conditioned response. This means that the person having the pain becomes so familiar with the pain, that the pain continues as a response, even though the cause is removed.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow your caregiver's instructions about taking medicines, doing tests, counseling, and follow-up treatment.
- Do not use scented tampons, douches, vaginal sprays, or soaps.
- Use water- based lubricants for dryness. Oil lubricants can cause irritation.
- Do not use spermicides or condoms that irritate you.
- Openly discuss with your partner your sexual experience, your desires, foreplay, and different sexual positions for a more comfortable and enjoyable sexual relationship.
- Join group sessions for therapy, if needed.
- Practice safe sex at all times.
- Discuss the problem with your sex partner.
- Empty your bladder before having intercourse.
- Try different positions during sexual intercourse.
- Take over-the-counter pain medicine recommended by your caregiver, before having sexual intercourse.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse.
- You develop a lump at the opening of your vagina, even if it is not painful.

- You have abnormal vaginal discharge.
- You have vaginal dryness.
- You have itching or irritation of the vulva and/or vagina.
- You develop a rash or reaction to your medicine.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop severe abdominal pain during or shortly after sexual intercourse. (You could have a ruptured ovarian cyst or ruptured tubal pregnancy.)
- You develop a temperature of 100ºF (37.9ºC) or higher, after having sexual intercourse.
- You have painful or bloody urination.
- You have painful sexual intercourse, and you never had it before.
- You pass out after having sexual intercourse.

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