

Sex, Pain & Endometriosis

Key Information for Patients

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a condition that affects approximately 1 in 10 women and an unmeasured number of gender diverse people. It occurs when endometrial-like tissue, similar to tissue that grows on the inside of the uterus, grows on other parts of the body¹. Often, it grows on the lining of the abdomen, but can also be present on the uterus, ovaries, bladder, or colon¹. It has even been found on the appendix and diaphragm.

What are the symptoms of endometriosis?

The symptoms are different for everyone. Common symptoms include:

- Pain felt in the pelvis during periods (dysmenorrhea)
- Persistent or chronic pain felt in the pelvis
- Pain felt during and/or after sex (dyspareunia)
- Pain felt during bowel movements (dyschezia)
- Pain felt during urination (dysuria)
- Abnormal bleeding during periods
- Difficulty getting pregnant

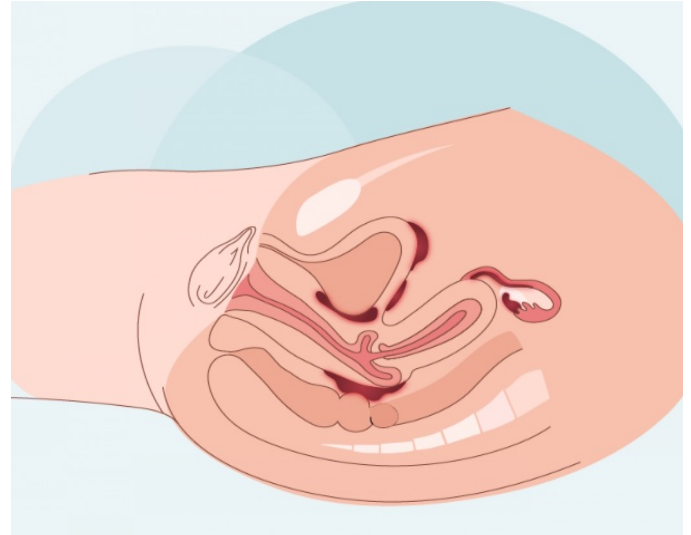


Figure 1. Female pelvic floor

What is dyspareunia?

The medical term for painful sex is dyspareunia (dis-puh-ROO-nee-uh), defined as persistent or recurrent genital pain that occurs just before, during or after intercourse^{2,3}. Talk to your doctor if you're having painful intercourse.

There are two different types of dyspareunia. Deep dyspareunia which occurs in more than 50% of people with endometriosis, is pain during and/or after vaginal penetration⁴.

Superficial dyspareunia, is pain which you might feel at the entrance of your vagina.



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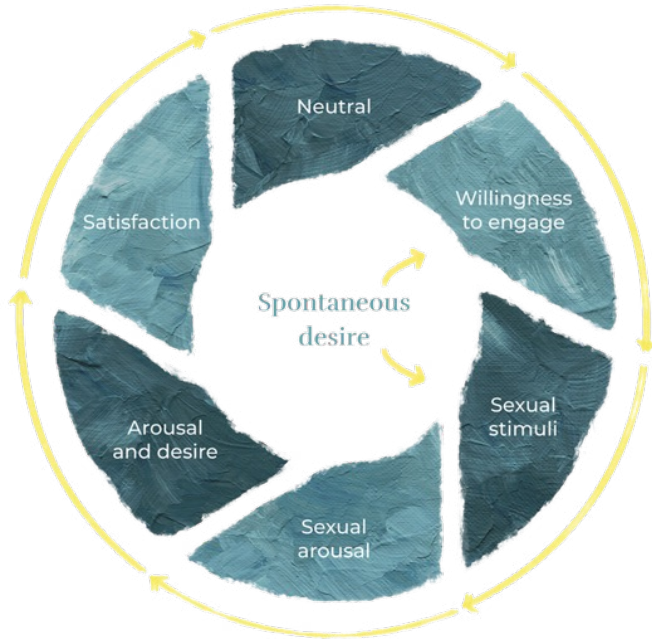


Endometriosis &
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What causes painful sex if you have endometriosis?

There are many reasons why you may feel pain with sex.

The pain may be caused by the endometriosis lesions themselves, or as a result of nerves that grow around the endometriosis⁵. If you have chronic pain, your nerves may also become sensitized and result in high levels of pain, even with light touch^{5,6,7}. Stress, anxiety, depression, emotions and experiences can all play a role in painful sex.



The sexual response cycle describes how your emotions might influence your sexual motivation, arousal and desire⁸. A pattern of negative experiences, such as painful sex, can affect sexual motivation, arousal and desire.

Painful sex can affect your thoughts, emotions and experiences which in turn can make your pain better or worse. Thoughts are an input into a pain experience.

If your sexual experiences are painful, this can reinforce negative thoughts and feelings about sex. A pattern of painful experiences might reduce your desire for sex or lead you to avoid it entirely⁸. There are psychological approaches that can help with low arousal and desire.

Figure 2. Sexual Response Cycle

Treatments

When you discuss sexual pain with a health care provider, treatment plans are created that best fit your needs.

There are many treatment options available including surgery to remove endometriosis, medications to manage symptoms, mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and pelvic floor physiotherapy.

Your pain is real.

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