

# Sexual problems

## for people with a vulva/vagina/uterus



While the causes of sexual problems vary, help and treatment is available. People are often reluctant to seek help about their sexual problems as they are embarrassed, but should remember they are not alone in having difficulties and that doctors, counsellors and therapists deal with these kind of issues every day.

### Painful intercourse

Many people experience painful intercourse, but it should not be ignored.

Vaginal pain during intercourse can often be caused by a lack of lubrication or not being aroused enough, an infection such as thrush or herpes, or a small tear. Abdominal or deep pelvic pain may suggest infection of the tubes with a sexually transmissible infection (STI), or the possibility of endometriosis.

Emotional disturbances, such as a history of sexual abuse, can also be responsible for pain. Some people have vaginismus, a condition in which the vaginal muscles tighten so much they make penetration difficult and painful.

If you are experiencing persistent painful sex see a doctor straight away – if you have an untreated STI, it can damage the Fallopian tubes and affect fertility. It is also important to exclude physical reasons for any pain before putting it down to psychological factors.

Vaginal dryness can often affect sexual pleasure, and over-the-counter lubricants, e.g. KY Jelly, may be helpful.

### Low libido

Low libido is another common sexual problem that can be related to a variety of factors.

### Contraception

Hormone-based contraceptives, such as the Pill, can affect libido levels, as they 'flatten out' the highs of sex hormones which are linked to sexual desire. Sometimes changing the form of contraception you are using can improve the situation – speak to your doctor for more details.

## Pregnancy

Hormone shifts during pregnancy and after giving birth can affect libido. People who are pregnant often feel nauseous and tired which can contribute to a low sex drive.

Some people feel very sexual and have a high libido during pregnancy, only to be the opposite once the baby is born. As hormone shifts can continue for a long time after birth, when coupled with things such as lack of sleep, it is not unusual for people to lose their sex drive for a long period of time.

## Other factors

Things like stress and relationship problems can also affect libido levels. If you think the problem is your relationship, counselling is an option – while many people find it difficult to talk about their sexual problems, sharing your problems with your partner is often the first step to overcoming them.

## Orgasm difficulties

This is a common problem for many people and there are many factors which can be the cause. Lots of communication and practice with a loving and sensitive partner can be the best way to enjoy sex. Many people are able to experience orgasm through clitoral stimulation rather than vaginal penetration. Practising on your own (masturbation) and working out what feels good can also help, as can spending more time on foreplay.

## Age

Normal aging brings about physical changes in everyone. Most older people will notice changes to their vagina, including having less lubrication. Using a lubricant can be helpful.

Loss of bladder control or leaking urine is more common as people get older. While incontinence can cause some people to avoid sex, the problem can usually be treated. Speak to your doctor if you are concerned.

People suffering from arthritis can find sex uncomfortable. Some light exercise and a warm bath beforehand can be useful. You can also try using cushions and pillows for support and adopting more relaxed positions. Some people find it helps to use appropriate pain relief before sex.