



SEXUAL HEALTH AND SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION

What Is Sexuality?

Sexuality is a complicated part of each of us that includes physical and psychological expressions of pleasure and intimacy. Culture, religious beliefs, and family traditions all affect who we are sexually. Sexuality may change with age, experience, and health conditions. When a person is ill, the physical changes caused by illness can change sexual functioning.

What Is Sexual Health?

Sexual health is achieving sexual satisfaction however is most comfortable for you.

What Is Sexual Dysfunction?

There are four types of female sexual dysfunction (problems):

- 1) Decreased sexual desire/interest
- 2) Arousal disorder, which means trouble feeling like you want to have sex
- 3) Dyspareunia, which means sex is painful
- 4) Difficulty or inability to have orgasm

In addition to having one or more of these four problems, the problem has to be concerning to you.

What Causes Sexual Dysfunction?

There are many causes of sexual dysfunction, including those in this table.

Common Causes of Sexual Dysfunction

Diabetes	Infection	Stress
Menopause	Endometriosis	Psychological Issues
Arthritis	Surgery	History of Sexual Abuse
Incontinence	Chemotherapy	Relationship Issues
Cancer	Radiation Therapy	Gender Identity Conflicts
Fatigue	Heart, Lung, Liver, Kidney, or Thyroid Disease	Medications*
Alcohol or Drug Abuse	Depression	

*Including but not limited to the following: Beta-Blockers, Antidepressants, Narcotics, Antipsychotics, Antihistamines, Anticholinergics

When Should I Seek Medical Attention?

If you have any of the following concerns, talk to your health care provider:

- Less interested in sex
- Pain with sex
- Difficulty having orgasm
- Feelings of depression
- Your partner is hurting you

What Can I Do if I Think I Have Sexual Dysfunction?

Talk about any sexual concerns that you have with your health care provider. There are many possible reasons for sexual dysfunctions, and your provider can help find out the cause and suggest treatment. Here are some suggestions for specific sexual dysfunctions:

If you have less sexual desire than you want

- Try changing your “normal” routine. For example, you could use different positions, toys, more foreplay, or change the time of the day that you have sex.

If painful penetration (when the penis is put in the vagina) is the problem

- Sometimes vaginal lubricants can help solve painful penetration. You can get these at the drugstore without a prescription.
- Try different positions (being on top provides women more control).
- Increase lubrication (wetness) through more foreplay and waiting until you are more aroused before penetration.

If you are having difficulty achieving orgasm

- Use more foreplay and communication with your partner.
- Many women do not have orgasm with penetration alone; try gentle clitoral stimulation or masturbation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Web Sites:

- Sex and a Healthier You
www.sexandahealthieryou.org/sex-health/index.html
- *Multidisciplinary Approach to the Treatment of Sexual Pain, Dyspareunia, Vulvodynia, and Pelvic Pain: Pelvic Pain and Painful Sex*
www.sexwithoutpain.com
- National Vulvodynia Association (NVA)
www.nva.org
- PDQ Series on Sexuality and Reproductive Issues for people with cancer from the National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/supportivecare/sexuality/Patient/page1
- American Cancer Society Web site – Sexuality for the Woman with Cancer
www.cancer.org/docroot/MIT/MIT_7_1x_SexualityforWomenandTheirPartners.asp

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