

REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN

A New Way to Look at Sex

Does sex make you feel sad and alone?

- With chronic pelvic pain, your body can change every day. This is like any other injury.
- Stress, hormones, allergies, infections and medicines can change the place and type of pain or pleasure you feel.
- Something that felt good yesterday could hurt today and something that hurt yesterday could feel good today.
- This can be confusing and sex can feel scary for you and your partner. You might both feel sad and alone.



You are not alone.

Many couples living with pelvic pain feel just like you do. They say things like this:

- “When I think of sex, I think of pain”
- “I want my partner to touch me, but I’m afraid any touch will turn into sex and hurt”
- “Instead of bringing us closer together, sex usually ends with us both feeling bad”
- “It seems like every place I touch is wrong. I’m afraid to hurt my partner”
- “When I try to touch my partner, they* push me away. My partner doesn’t want me anymore”

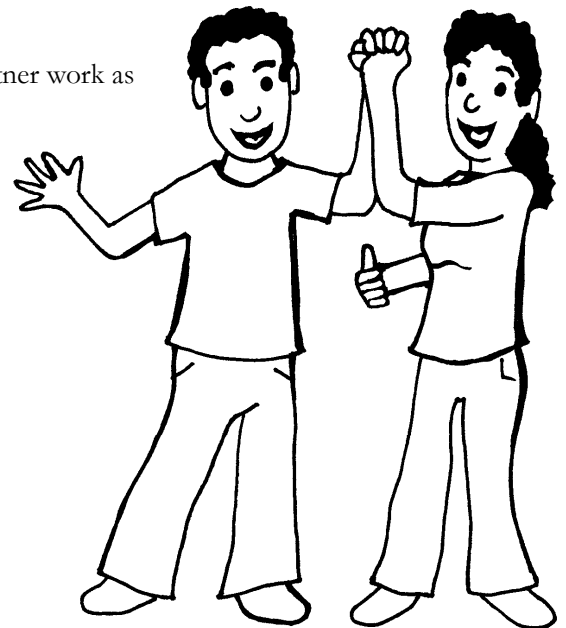


Re-invent your sex life.

Building a loving and satisfying sex life is possible if you and your partner work as a team:

Think of sex in a new way.

- Sex isn’t something you do. It’s a way to connect and learn about what feels good for your body.
- Since your body is new every day, expect a new adventure every day. With you, learning about pleasure will be new and exciting and never boring.
- Do not focus on a goal, focus on feeling and learning.
- Connecting through touch can lower stress and pain levels, and bring you closer to your partner.
- Find a way to touch as much as possible, even if it’s not sexual. Try holding hands, hugging, cuddling or kissing.



* “They” and “them” are used for gender-neutrality, even when not grammatically correct.

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Learn about your new body

- Rate how touch feels as good, not good or neither. Do not judge what you feel. Just notice it.
- Listen to your new body. When something feels good, do more of it. When it hurts, stop doing it and find something else to do.
- Learn the difference between pain and fear. When you begin to feel uncomfortable, slow down and notice if the feeling goes away or still hurts. If it hurts, stop doing what hurts.
- Try to lower stress and control allergies and infections. These can make your pain worse.
- Check your medicines. Ask your doctors about possible side effects that could affect your sex life, and weigh the risks and rewards of the medicines. Consider the following side effects:
 - weight gain, which might affect your body image
 - bad breath or body smell, which might affect your body image
 - dryness of the mouth, which could also dry out your vagina, can change your breath or make you drink more and need to urinate more during sex
 - sleep changes, being tired or drowsy
 - urinary difficulty, constipation or diarrhea
 - vaginal infections
 - lowered sex drive or response
 - orgasm difficulty or delayed orgasm
- Exercise or be active. Circulation is important for your sexual health.
- Stimulate your imagination and your 5 senses: touch, taste, smell, sound and sight. The handout called *REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN: Pleasurable Activities and Products* gives you ideas for this.
- Warm up. Take all the time you need to relax and become aroused. This is part of listening to your body. Remember, don't judge your body. Just notice.
- Practice. Test new toys or sensations by yourself before trying them with a partner.

Include your partner

- Include your partner in the learning process when you are ready.
- Stay connected. Make time to be together while you learn, even if you are not ready to be sexual. Try taking a walk or cooking together.
- Be romantic. Try eating dinner by candlelight or writing a love note.
- Suggest a place your partner can touch your body whenever you're together. Try kissing, holding hands, or cuddling.
- For more tips on including your partner, see the handout called *REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN: A Guide for Couples*.

