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## How to talk to your partner about painful sex

Sex is supposed to feel good for all involved, but when you start to experience pain during intercourse it can create tension between you and your partner.

Let's be honest, no one likes having an awkward conversation at the best of times. But it's important that you can talk to your partner about pain during sex: after all, it's not supposed to be a painful experience.

Here [Neil Wilkie](#), a relationships expert and psychotherapist, and Ruby Payne, in-house sex and relationships expert from sex toy company [UberKinky](#), discuss how to talk to your partner about pain during sex.

### 'Oh' – but not the good kind

Sex is a really important part of a relationship for a lot of couples, with many feeling that being intimate deepens their connection. But, unless you've specifically asked for it, [pain during sex](#) can make it a very distressing experience.

If it's you that's experiencing discomfort, Payne says it's important to let your partner know straightaway.

"If pain starts during sex – stop and talk to your partner about it. This can be difficult, but you should never just push through the pain. Talk about when exactly the pain started, as it could have been a particular position or movement that triggered it," she says.

She has similar advice for if you think your partner is experiencing pain.

"If your partner comes to you about pain during sex, it's important that you stay open-minded and listen. Remember that this has nothing to do with you and is highly unlikely to be your fault - so don't make it about yourself," Payne adds.

"Listen to your partner and what they have to say, then ask what you can do to help. Encourage them to speak to a doctor or other professional, and - if they are open to it - how you can adapt your sex life to avoid the pain.

"Sex isn't just all about P in V, so have a plan B in place for you to connect, whether that's another form of sex or an activity you can share."

Wilkie adds there are two simple questions to ask: What is good when you're having sex, and what would be 'ven better if' when we have sex?

"If it is causing pain then that is not good for either of you. The one who is in pain will start to avoid sex or just not enjoy it," he says.

"The pain giver may be unaware or feel bad that they are not creating pleasure. Or you are picking up that sex is not as enjoyable for your partner as you would like. If so, you need to talk about it and not hope that it will just go away."

## Talking tips

So, we've established why it's important to talk about it but that's easier said than done, right?

Payne and Wilkie have put together a helpful list of tips to remember when having the conversation. They include:

- Choosing a time when you won't be distracted and you can talk about the situation completely.
- Speaking to your partner about any other issues that come up. Sometimes a lack of sex can cause issues in a relationship. Don't sit on them; talk about them openly and honestly.
- Supporting your partner completely. They might need a hug or just verbal support; give them whatever they need.
- Realising that your partner cannot read your mind.

- Focusing on the importance of sex in your relationship.
- Focusing on your feelings.
- Realising that creating a happy and fulfilling sex life is possible and highly desirable.
- Understanding that talking about it is essential and will improve both your futures.
- Creating the time and space to do this.

There's also an important list of things not to do if sex is causing you pain.

"This is a sensitive area. The whole issue of masculinity, femininity and sexual attractiveness mean walls may spring up. This is about you both having a fun and fulfilling sex life," Wilkie says.

It's equally important to avoid certain reactions and actions. Don't:

- Blame your partner (whether you're the one experiencing the pain or they are the one experiencing the pain).
- Avoid the conversation.
- Rush the topic.
- Minimise the problem.
- 'Push through the pain' or sacrifice your comfort for your partner's pleasure.
- Take no for an answer when you speak to medical professionals and you feel they haven't taken you seriously.
- Take what your partner says personally if they approach you. This isn't about you, or your fault.

## **The root of the problem**

There are many reasons why you may experience pain during sex, some more worrying than others. According to the NHS, pain during sex can be caused by illness, infection, a physical problem or a psychological one.

For women, this pain might be felt in the vagina or deeper in the pelvis. For men it's often felt on the penis.

"Pain during sex can be caused by a number of things: infections such as [chlamydia](#) or [thrush](#); [menopause](#); lack of sexual arousal or lubrication; vaginismus, or even a genital irritation or allergy," Payne explains.

"Conditions such as [vulvodynia](#), [lichen sclerosus](#), [pelvic inflammatory disease](#) and [endometriosis](#) can also cause painful sex.

"For men, cuts and infections can cause pain, along with conditions such as phimosis, where the foreskin is too tight to be retracted."

Pain in the vagina could be caused by:

- Infections like [thrush](#), [chlamydia](#), gonorrhoea or [genital herpes](#).
- Menopause - a change in hormones can make your vagina dry.
- [Vaginismus](#) - a condition that causes the muscles in or around the vagina to shut tightly, often making sex extremely painful or impossible.
- Genital irritation or allergy caused by spermicides, latex condoms or products such as soap and shampoo.

If the pain is felt deeper in the pelvis it could be:

- Pelvic inflammatory disease - a condition that causes inflammation and pain in the pelvis.
- [Endometriosis](#) - a condition that causes the tissue making up the lining of the womb to grow outside the womb.
- Fibroids growing near your vagina or cervix.
- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Constipation.

In men, painful sex could be:

- Infections like [thrush](#), [chlamydia](#), [gonorrhoea](#) or [genital herpes](#).

- A tight foreskin.
- Small tears in the foreskin.
- [Inflammation of the prostate gland.](#)
- Testicle pain and swelling, which can sometimes be caused by becoming aroused but not ejaculating, or by infections such as chlamydia.

## Help, I need somebody

If you're experiencing pain during sex it's important you seek medical help in case it's something serious.

"If you experience any kind of genital pain, then make an appointment with your doctor straightaway," Payne says. "If they tell you 'there's nothing wrong', then see another doctor. There is absolutely no reason to endure painful sex; doing so can contribute to stress, anxiety and depression, but it is never all in your head."

And it's not just doctors who can help: many people find psychosexual therapy helpful.

"This is a type of talking therapy that helps to address and change your feelings around your body and sex. So if you think an emotional reason or anxiety could be causing your issues, then you could request a referral to a counsellor or a sex therapist through your GP, or go private," Payne adds.

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