

REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN

A Guide for Couples



CONNECT

Couples can feel sad and alone because of pain. Don't let pain keep you apart.

- Assure your partner that you love them* and want to be with them.
- Assure your partner that you are committed to working together and want to connect.
- Both of your bodies are changing throughout your lives. Ask your partner to start a new adventure with you and your new body. It can be exciting, like being with a new partner every time.

LOVE

Get closer and show your love by being together.

- Spend time together. A happy sex life starts with connection, safety and trust, which are hard to build if you are strangers. Try walking, going for ice cream, dancing, singing, cooking or listening to music together.
- Find a way to touch as much as possible, even if it's not sexual. Touching can reduce stress and bring you closer to your partner. Try holding hands, exchanging hand or foot massages, hugging, cuddling or kissing.
- Be romantic. Do little things to show your partner you love them. Try planning a date, leaving a love note, making breakfast in bed, eating dinner in your pajamas by candlelight, helping around the house or taking a bath together.
- Stay close. Remember to spend time together, touch and be romantic. This will make the pleasurable activities below possible.
- Compliment your partner. Remember what makes your partner special and tell them often.



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

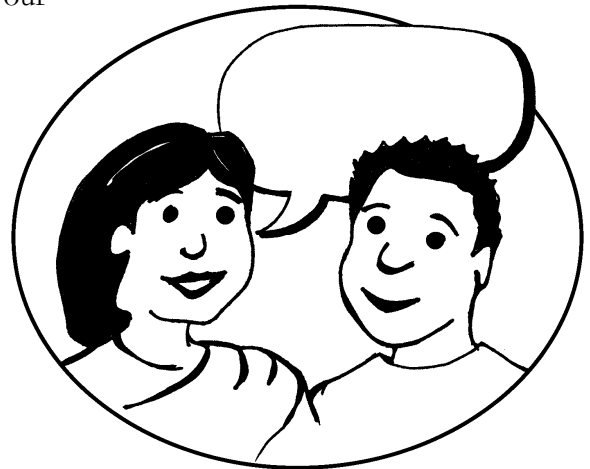
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LEARN

Learn about how pelvic pain affects your love life and how to make it better.

- Learn about how pelvic pain affects sex and intimacy. Look together at the handout called *REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN: A New Way to Look at Sex*, which discusses things like:
 - Many couples with pelvic pain feel sad and alone
 - For many people, pain can be different every day and what feels good one day could hurt another day.
 - Many people protect themselves from touch because they are scared of pain
 - Many partners can be afraid to touch because they are scared to hurt the person they love or that they will be rejected.
- Share with each other how pelvic pain affects you and your relationship.
- Talk about what each of you can do to make sex better for yourself and your partner.
- Talk about where your new bodies can hurt and feel good.
- Go the physical therapist together to learn ways to manage pain, prepare for pleasure and find pleasurable activities as a team.
- Respect that the other person is different from you. For instance, your partner might or might not want to have an orgasm every time you are together. Even if you would want something different, each person should decide what is right for their own body.
- Discuss ways for you to both get what you need when you need different things. For example, with all couples, there are times that one person will want to feel pleasure and the other will not. Agree on what you can do on those days that will work for both of you with no guilt or anger.



EXPLORE

You and your partner can both feel pleasure. Find what you can do together:

MAP YOUR PLEASURE

- Explore your pleasure scale (see illustration on next page). Let your partner touch your hand and rate each touch on a pleasure scale of -3 to +3. Do not judge what you feel. Just notice it.

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Pleasure Scale



- Return the favor for your partner at a different time or on a different day.
- Start slowly. Find one place on your body to touch and stay there only. Repeat that on different days until you are ready to move on to another place. Try starting with your hand and then moving to your arm or foot.
- Give each other a map of your bodies on a particular day. Make a game out of showing each other where you like to be touched and what areas are off-limits. You could draw with a body crayon or chocolate sauce, and allow your partner to follow the map.
- Think of each day as a one-time adventure. Just because something worked or did not work yesterday, it might be different today or tomorrow. You have a new body every day.
- Show and tell. Show your partner what feels good on your body and how to touch you in 3 steps:
 - Show your partner on your own body where and how you like to be touched.
 - Touch your partner in the way you like to be touched and tell your partner that's what you like
 - Ask your partner to touch you in that way and put your hand over your partner's hand as a guide
- Agree to the following:
 - You will not do any activity that makes either you or your partner uncomfortable.
 - You will stop all touch or stimulation as soon as it becomes painful.
 - Until touch becomes painful, you will relax and notice the sensations you experience.
- If something hurts or is uncomfortable and you have to tell your partner "not here," find a place to touch and say "here." You are not rejecting your partner, just a particular type of touch. Consider offering your hand, neck, lips, cheek, ear, foot, hip or back. You might ask your partner to touch your breasts, nipples, stomach, buttocks or even your genitals.
- If something hurts or is uncomfortable, it might be because of the type of touch, not the place. Consider asking your partner to slow down or speed up, or to touch you softer or harder. Consider touching with something soft like fabric or a feather.

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ENJOY THE PLEASURE HUNT

- Enjoy the process of connecting and exploring. Pay attention to what you feel in the moment and make connecting and exploring your goal.
- Make a list. When you find an enjoyable activity or idea, write it down. Look at your list for inspiration.
- Slow down. Excitement builds when you take longer to get there. Going too quickly can make it hard to relax or enjoy.

- Make love to your partner's mind. Try reading or making up a sexy story, showing a sexy picture or movie, or dressing up like a sexy character.
- 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.
- Explore ways for you both to feel pleasure. These could include cuddling, full-body skin contact, self-stimulation, partner stimulation, oral sex, intercourse, using toys and more. Please see the handout called *REDUCE SEXUAL PAIN: Pleasurable Activities and Products* for ideas to pleasure, arouse and stimulate.

