

## Is sex more agony than ecstasy?

**Painful sex takes the fun out of passion and can have devastating emotional impact. Sex therapist Anna Kingsley is here to help**

### You're not alone

Pain during sex is very common. Nearly three out of four women have pain during intercourse at some time during their lives. For some women, the pain is only a temporary problem; for others, it's a long-term issue.

### Get help

See your GP or go to a sexual health clinic (you can find your nearest one online). The pain may be a sign of a gynaecological problem, such as ovarian cysts or endometriosis. It may be caused by problems with sexual response, such as a lack of desire, or a lack of arousal (the physical and emotional changes that occur in the body as a result of sexual stimulation).

### Could it be in your head?

There's often some emotional element to this problem. Painful sex is distressing and this distress may well make you tighten up down below. And the tightening up will only make the pain worse for you the next time. The emotional impact of this on a relationship can also be huge – another reason to sort the problem out as soon as possible.

### Relax your mind

This is easier said than done, but try. Make sure that you feel totally comfortable and have no distractions. Don't even try having sex when you're tired or stressed. Give yourself plenty of time. A quickie will only leave you in more pain. Most importantly, do what makes you feel happy in the build up – cuddle, watch TV and so on. The relaxation can only be a good thing for your body.

### Pre-empt the pain

Empty your bladder, take a warm bath (don't stimulate your genitals with soap or chemicals). Try an over-the-counter painkiller before you have sex.

### Warm up

That means foreplay and lots of it. So ask for it. If you take it slow, you'll start to feel good about having sex and your body will adjust accordingly. If penetration is particularly painful, start off with your fingers, or sex toys, before getting to the real deal.

### Experiment

Every woman is different, but find a position that allows you to have the most amount of pleasure with the least amount of pain. And once you've found it, resist the urge to feel guilty about sticking to it. Chances are, your partner cares more about pleasing you than having porn-star sex!

### Talk about it

Tell your partner where and when you feel pain and the activities you find pleasurable. Talk to the experts. You don't just have to put up with this and it can be treated – successfully.

### Don't dry up

Lubricate, lubricate, lubricate! It will ease any friction during sex. As a rule, buy water-based and unscented lubricants, such as the Yes brand. Natural oils work well. Some women swear by olive oil, but it can break down the latex in condoms.

**Work out where the pain is**

Ask yourself whether the pain is deep inside or near the outside. This is important as it can help sort out what's wrong, and your doctor will want to know. Try to identify if you're feeling pain in your lower back, pelvic region, uterus or bladder.