

## **Introduction**

Being sex positive at Come As You Are means we consider sexuality to be a site of tremendous health, pleasure and strength in our lives. We also realize that many of us experience physical, emotional, and psychic pain around sexuality. We are great cheerleaders of the positive potential of sex, but proceed with respect and awareness that sometimes sex can feel too painful to talk about.

Whatever the source of our pain, many of us will be faced with the challenge of trying to navigate this barrier to pleasure. For some of us this may be a brief encounter and for others it may be a lifelong challenge.

Though this process can be wrought with challenges and frustration, we also believe it opens up opportunities to redefine what pleasure means to each of us and re-imagine new ways of finding it!

This pamphlet offers a non-medical, pleasure based approach to sex and pain.

## **Accessing help**

Unfortunately, there is still a lot we don't know about many of the conditions that cause sex to be painful. What we do know is that no one should be told that unwanted pain during sex is "normal".

If you are experiencing pain during sex it is important to see a health professional to ensure that any underlying physical cause is treated whenever possible. Before an appointment it can be helpful to make some notes, including information about your pain (when does it occur, what do you do/take for it, how long has it been going on, etc.) as well as questions you have for the health professional. Having notes with you may help you feel calmer and more focused, and ensure you get what you need out of an appointment.

When it comes to pain during sex, help can come in many forms. For some, it may mean accessing relationship or personal therapy, physiotherapy, or medical help; for others it may be about reducing their stress levels or making other changes to their day to day lives.

Remember, whenever you are accessing help, don't be afraid to be your own best advocate! Absolutely ask questions, know your options, and get second opinions!

## **Sex the way YOU want it!**

If you are experiencing pain during sex it may be helpful to try and re-imagine what sex includes. Often we are encouraged to think of sex as vaginal sex or partner sex. But

sex doesn't have to be either of these things. With or without pain, limiting what you think of as sex often only serves to limit your options for pleasure.

People experience sexual ecstasy while being fed a sensual meal, while having warm oil rubbed into their skin, or while being handcuffed to the bed post, and in a thousand other ways. Imagine the kind of sex you WANT to have, not the kind you think you ought to have.

## **The joy of solo sex**

When pain becomes a part of our sexual response many of us stop all sexual touch, even masturbation. Time spent on our own and exploring our bodies can be a key tool in learning, or relearning, how pleasurable sex can work for us. Often the pain we experience during sex is not inevitable pain, so making time when you don't do anything that hurts and only things that feel good is important! Explore whether touching your body in new ways or in new places can create a pleasurable feeling.

Knowing what it is that you enjoy can help you communicate to others where to go and where to avoid so that you start minimizing your pain and maximizing your pleasure.

## Toys and tools

Together with a medical professional we designed a set of six 100% silicone dilators. We find these items are often useful exercisers for people experiencing vaginal pain or post-surgery therapy.

When we are experiencing pain our bodies tend to carry around a lot of tension. Massages (with all natural massage oils) can help us not only release this tension, but also reconnect with others and explore erogenous zones all over our bodies.

Vibrators come in lots of shapes and sizes, and offer a range of vibrations from very subtle to very intense. Whether used internally or externally, they may offer a new sensation and increase blood flow.

Erotic books and DVDs can be filled with creative approaches to enjoying sex. From sensual massage to erotic rope bondage, educational to hardcore, they can offer all sorts of new ways to heat things up.

## Get in touch

Need more information? We can be reached by phone at 1-888-504-7934 or via email at [info@comeasyouare.com](mailto:info@comeasyouare.com).

## Online Resources

The Sexual Health Network offers an array of articles, mostly from a medical perspective on a range of sexual health issues, including pain during intercourse.

[www.sexualhealth.com](http://www.sexualhealth.com)

Scarleteen offers a youth-friendly, sex positive approach to sexual health information. Articles on sex and pain include From OW! To WOW: Demystifying Painful Intercourse.

[www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)

Canadian Physiotherapy Association. Offers referrals to physiotherapists who specialize in pelvic and sexual pain.

[www.thesehands.ca/](http://www.thesehands.ca/)

Info and resources on vulvodynia from Queen's University's Sexual Health Research Laboratory

<http://psyc.queensu.ca/faculty/pukall/whatisvulvodynia.htm>

## Books

*The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability.* Includes discussion of chronic pain throughout. Miriam Kaufman, M.D, Cory Silverberg and Fran Odette.

*Healing Sex*

A mind-body approach to healing sexual trauma. Staci Haines.

# Sex and Unwanted Pain

## Re-imagining paths to pleasure



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