

# HUMAN PERFORMANCE CENTRE

For Women Only. We Can Help!

Dyspareunia is the global term that refers to pain inside or outside the vaginal area with intercourse. One in five women in North America suffers from dyspareunia.

When a woman has pain in the pelvic area, muscles tighten to provide protection. Unfortunately this leads to increased stretch and pressure around the vagina. With increased pressure, there is increased pain, which leads to increased anxiety and tension and more pain.

There are a variety of sources that can produce pain in and around the vaginal area. Vaginal yeast infections can cause pain. Irritation, of the area around the vagina, can be caused by shaving and waxing and wearing thongs, tight jeans or menstrual pads. Washing with soap, strong laundry detergents and feminine deodorant sprays can be sources of irritation. Swimming in salt water more so than chlorinated water and staying in a wet bathing suit can also be irritants. Pain may develop after an episiotomy, colposcopy or

gynecological exam. Medical conditions that are associated with pelvic pain are irritable bowel syndrome, urethral syndrome and interstitial cystitis. Dermatitis can result in skin changes and subsequently the skin becomes painful. Reduced vaginal folds and lubrication along with pH changes with menopause, can cause vaginal pain with intercourse. Of note, women who have dyspareunia have been found to be no more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse and are generally well adjusted in their relationships.

Be aware that when pain is provoked along the entrance to the vagina it may be felt as a burning sensation after intercourse, lasting from 1-24 hours, causing it to be confused with a bladder infection.

Ways to avoid creating pain along the vaginal area are to trim pubic hairs to no less than ¼" rather than shave or wax. Wear a thong that is a size larger or avoid wearing at all. Monitor that menstrual pads are not

irritating the pubic area or causing a yeast infection.

Applying a pea-sized amount of a gentle moisturiser such as Glaxibase *Creme*, Ceravé *Creme* or Cuti-base *Creme* which are safe for the vaginal area, can ease irritation. If applied in the morning and evening, a creme may help reduce irritation from a pad and ease discomfort. Avoid washing the vaginal area with soaps as this can lead to an infection. Instead, use just water or low-sudsing soaps and avoid bubble baths. The more comfortable choice for treatment of a yeast infection would be an oral antifungal.

Women who have dyspareunia demonstrate tight pelvic floor muscles with poor voluntary control and poor pelvic floor muscle strength. If you have made changes to reduce sources of vaginal irritation, yet still have pain, an assessment by a physiotherapist will help to identify if the problem is around or within the vagina. A physiotherapist can help improve the length and muscle control of the

pelvic floor muscles through individualized treatment programs and thus ease pain felt during intercourse.



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