

## WHY BECOME A SHFPACT MEMBER

SHFPACT strives to provide a high quality healthcare service. Our consultation times are generally longer than in general practice, and we provide a specialised reproductive and sexual health service. Quality care is however expensive to provide and the membership discount is one way we can make sure you receive the very best service and the time you need with our team of reproductive and sexual health doctors, nurses, counsellors and educators, without breaking the budget.

**BECOME  
A MEMBER  
AND SAVE  
TODAY!**

## WHAT DO YOU GET AS A MEMBER?

- Special members discount rates for consultations at SHFPACT clinic and Canberra Menopause Centre.
- 5% discount on bookshop purchases.
- Free or discounted attendance at health information and special events. For example: Healthy Menopause Information Evenings by the Canberra Menopause Centre, Parent Information Evenings about communicating with your children and young people about puberty, relationships, etc.
- SHFPACT members enews that will keep you updated with special members events, activities and other services.

JOIN ONLINE AT  
**shfpact.org.au**  
OR AT RECEPTION



### OPENING HOURS

Please contact our reception staff on 02 6247 3077 or visit [shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au) for SHFPACT clinic hours

### LOCATION

SHFPACT is conveniently located in the city.

Level 1,  
28 University Avenue  
Canberra ACT 2601

### CONTACT

02 6247 3077  
[shfpact@shfpact.org.au](mailto:shfpact@shfpact.org.au)  
0400 770 999 (SMS ONLY)

### ENGAGE

[shfpact.org.au](http://shfpact.org.au)  
[facebook.com/shfpact](https://facebook.com/shfpact)  
[twitter.com/shfpact](https://twitter.com/shfpact)

### DONATE

All donations to SHFPACT over \$2.00 are tax deductible

### SHFPACT CLINICAL SERVICES

- Contraceptive advice, information & services
- IUD's and other long acting contraceptive options
- Cervical screening
- Canberra Menopause Centre
- Unplanned Pregnancy Counselling Service
- Sexually transmissible infections(STIs): testing, treatment and advice
- Blood borne virus and HIV testing
- Emergency contraception (the 'Morning After' Pill)
- Breast checks and breast awareness education
- Fertility issues and pre-conception advice
- Sexual difficulties and sexuality education
- PrEP information, advice, and prescription

SHFPACT is a health promotion charity (HPC) assisted with funding from the ACT Government.

I'M ALL ABOUT

# PAINFUL SEX IN WOMEN



Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT  
Level 1, 28 University Ave, Canberra City  
Call 02 6247 3077 • SMS 0400 770 999  
or email [shfpact@shfpact.org.au](mailto:shfpact@shfpact.org.au)

## shfpact.org.au

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## PAINFUL SEX IN WOMEN

Painful sex is a very common problem for women and can occur at any age. Three out of four women experience painful sex at some stage in their life. For some women this may be only temporary, while for others it may be a long term problem. The medical term for painful sex is dyspareunia. (dis-par-roonia)

Sex is a normal and enjoyable part of many people's lives and is often an integral part of a relationship. Pain during sex can cause significant emotional distress and can lead to avoidance of sex and intimacy, which in turn can affect a relationship.

## TYPES AND LOCATION OF PAIN WITH SEX

Pain with sex can occur in the vulval area (the outside), in the vestibule (the area surrounding the vagina), just inside the vagina itself, or deep within the vagina or pelvic area. Pain can be in many forms including irritation, burning, stabbing, aching, throbbing or cramping. It can range from mild to moderate or can be severe preventing any sexual activity. Pain during sex can be one off, short lived, recurrent or long term.

## CAUSES OF PAINFUL SEX

Painful sex can have many different causes, however sometimes a physical cause is not found.

- Pain in the vulval area may be caused by infections such as thrush, skin conditions such as dermatitis, or the cause may be unknown.
- Pain at the entrance to the vagina when penetration with a penis, finger or sex toy is attempted may be caused by infections or skin conditions; spasm of the pelvic floor muscles; the presence of damage or scarring following childbirth or surgery; lack of lubrication; lack of sexual arousal; or changes that can occur after menopause.

- Pain on deep penetration may be caused by lack of arousal, infection, conditions related to the ovaries such as ovarian cysts; endometriosis; lower back problems; bladder or bowel problems or may simply be due to the sexual position used during deep penetration.
- Pain can also be due to how the nerves in the genital and pelvic area respond to sensation, and how the brain interprets signals from these nerves. This can happen with no tissue damage and no specific pathology.

Emotional or psychological causes of pain are common and may be a part of the picture or a cause themselves.

## DIAGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT

If you experience painful sex, it is important that you see a doctor who has a special interest in this area. They will be able to help you with tests to identify possible causes, and if needed, prescribe medication, or refer to other medical specialists such as dermatologists and gynaecologists. Managing painful sex usually means receiving care from a variety of health professionals. The doctor will discuss with you the role of pelvic floor physiotherapy, psychological and counselling support, and sex and relationship therapy in managing your situation.

## SELF-HELP STRATEGIES:

- Talk to your partner about what you like and what feels good for you with sex.
- Try to make time for sex and create good conditions for sex. For example allow some time to unwind and relax first, make sure that you are comfortable, that the room is not too cold or hot, don't feel rushed, and make sure that you cannot be disturbed (have a lock on the door if you have children or housemates who may interrupt you), put on some music if that feels good, and turn your phone off!
- Empty your bladder beforehand because having a full bladder can cause discomfort during sex.
- Use plenty of lubricant. If you are using condoms make sure it's a water based lubricant. If you are not using condoms then a pure vegetable oil such as sweet almond oil can be an excellent lubricant as well as a vaginal moisturiser.
- Negotiate what you want, if you just feel like some pleasurable touching then talk about that with your partner. If penetrative sex feels too difficult then negotiate something else, mutual masturbation, oral sex, or just sensual touching or massage. Intimacy does not have to involve penetration.

- Allow yourself to focus on sexy thoughts, try not to pay attention to anxious or stressful thoughts. Focus on your body and the sensations you are feeling. Being present in the moment can be a very helpful skill in managing pain and increasing pleasure during sex.
- Make sure you have plenty of pleasurable touch and foreplay and feel ready for sex before attempting any penetration.



## COUNSELLING SUPPORT

Emotional, psychological and relationship factors play an important part in painful sex. They can be a cause of pain in sex, or be part of the problem.

Counselling with an experienced sexual and relationship counsellor can be very valuable in improving the situation for you and your partner.

### RESOURCES AND BOOKS:

- Where did my libido go? Dr Rosie King
- Good loving great sex. Dr Rosie King.
- Care Down There: [caredownthere.com.au](http://caredownthere.com.au)
- The Australian & New Zealand Vulvovaginal Society [anzvs.org/patient-information](http://anzvs.org/patient-information)

### REFERENCES:

ACOG: [acog.org/Patients/FAQs/When-Sex-Is-Painful](http://acog.org/Patients/FAQs/When-Sex-Is-Painful)  
 ANZVS: [anzvs.org](http://anzvs.org)