

# When Sex Hurts

Sex can feel good, but sometimes it can hurt. Sex can hurt for people of any age, sex and gender. Any type of sex can hurt (e.g., vaginal, oral, anal and hand) and may be felt during or after sex.

For some people, painful sex happens once in a while. For others, it can be an ongoing problem. Sex doesn't have to keep hurting. There are usually things that can help.

You have the right to decide whether or not you want to have sex. Talk with your partners about consent.

## Why does sex hurt?

Sex can hurt for many reasons. Causes of painful sex can include:

- Infection
- Skin or tissue irritation
- Medical conditions, such as endometriosis or hemorrhoids
- Vaginal dryness
- Tight foreskin or scars on the penis
- Medications
- Sexual position
- Rushed or rough sex
- Past injury from childbirth, surgery or trauma
- Pelvic floor muscle spasms
- Hormone changes
- Feelings like stress, anxiety or shame

Some people who have had painful sex may worry that it might hurt again, which can lead to a cycle of continued painful sex. Worry can cause muscle tightness (for vaginal and anal sex) and vaginal dryness (for vaginal sex).



## When should I get help?

Talk with your healthcare provider about painful sex so that they can make sure there isn't a medical reason for it. Be sure to see a healthcare provider if painful sex is frequent, severe, or you also have symptoms of an infection. Tell them about your symptoms, any medications you are on, and the things you have tried.

## How is painful sex treated?

Treatments for painful sex may include:

- Finding and treating an underlying health problem or infection
- Pelvic floor physiotherapy
- Exercises
- Medications
- Counselling

## What else can help?

There are many things people can try to help make sex more comfortable, like:

- exploring your own body to know what feels good for you.
- talking with partners about your needs, what feels good, limits and consent.
- having sex only when you and your partners want to.
- doing things to get ready for sex like relaxing foreplay, or masturbation.
- peeing and/or pooping before sex.
- taking it slowly during sex.
- stopping if it hurts.
- using lube during sex. Water and silicone-based lubricants are safe to use with condoms.
- trying different sexual positions or different types of sex.
- applying a cool cloth to irritated areas after sex.
- avoiding products that can cause irritation (e.g., flavoured condoms, spermicides).
- getting professional help if past experiences could be impacting your ability to enjoy sex.

## Websites

- [ahs.ca/srh](https://www.ahs.ca/srh)
- [ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca](https://www.ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca)
- [TeachingSexualHealth.ca](https://www.TeachingSexualHealth.ca)
- [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [sexandu.ca](https://www.sexandu.ca)
- [Help after sexual assault: aasas.ca](https://www.Helpaftersexualassault.ca)

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.



Scan for more information