



How do partners influence pain and sexual satisfaction in people who experience vulvar pain during sex?

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Researchers looked at the impact of relationship factors on pain during sex and sexual satisfaction in women with provoked vestibulodynia (PVD), which is the most common type of vulvar pain.

What are the different types of partner responses to painful intercourse?

Researchers have identified three types of partner responses to all kind of pain, including pain during sexual activity.



Solicitous Responses

When a partner responds to the pain with an exaggerated expression of sympathy, attention, or support. For example, a partner might suggest stopping the sexual activity, offer comfort, or ask how they can help.



Negative Responses

When a partner responds negatively to the pain. For example, a partner might express anger, irritation, disappointment, or frustration towards the person experiencing pain.



Facilitative Responses

When a partner encourages efforts to cope with the pain. For example, a partner might express happiness about engaging in sexual activity as a couple or share that they are feeling pleasure.

How did partner responses influence pain and sexual satisfaction in women with PVD?



Higher facilitative responses from partners (encouraging adaptive coping) was linked with women's **lower pain during sex** and **higher sexual satisfaction**.



Higher solicitous responses from partners (attention and sympathy) was linked with women's **higher pain during sex**.



Higher negative responses from partners (hostility and frustration) was linked with women's **lower sexual satisfaction**.

What do these results mean?



Facilitative partner responses to pain during sex (encouraging adaptive coping) may foster positive thoughts and emotions during sex. This positivity may help people manage pain and boost sexual pleasure, enhancing sexual satisfaction. Facilitative partner responses to pain may also help couples to redefine their sexual routine to include enjoyable non-penetrative activities.



Solicitous partner responses may magnify negative emotions and pain during sexual activity, prompting avoidance of sex. Although limiting painful intercourse is recommended, general avoidance of non-penetrative sexual activities can also harm intimacy and trigger feelings of invalidation and inadequacy. Partners may think it is helpful to check in about the pain during sex, but this response brings attention to the pain.



Negative partner responses may be interpreted by a person in pain as a lack of sensitivity and understanding, contributing to a more negative interaction and leading to lower sexual satisfaction.

What are the take-home messages?

Facilitative partner responses to pain during sex may help to alleviate vulvar pain and improve sexual satisfaction.

Solicitous partner responses contribute to higher pain during sex and negative partner responses contribute to lower sexual satisfaction.

Working together as a couple to identify and increase facilitative partner responses to pain during sex and decrease solicitous or negative partner responses can be helpful.

People who experience pain during sex and their partners can seek support from healthcare providers, such as **sex and couple therapists**, to manage pain as a couple.

Research Information

Funding Agencies

Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
Fonds Québécois de Recherche sur la Société et la Culture (FQRSC)

Psychologists & Researchers

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Links to Selected Publications



Rosen et al., 2010



Rosen et al., 2012



Rosen et al., 2013

