

How do partners influence pain and sexual satisfaction in women with PVD?



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The main objective of our research was to shed light on the impact of relationship variables on vulvo-vaginal pain and sexual satisfaction in women with provoked vestibulodynia (PVD).

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



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

- **Solicitous:** Partner reactions that include exaggerated expressions of sympathy, attention, and support. For example, your partner might suggest you stop the sexual activity, offer comfort, or ask how he can help

- **Negative:** For example, your partner might express anger, irritation, disappointment or frustration toward you.
- **Facilitative:** Partner reactions that encourage efforts at coping with the pain in a helpful way. For example, your partner might express happiness that you are engaging in sexual activity or say that you are pleasuring him.

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

We found that

- Higher solicitous responses were related to greater pain during intercourse.
- Higher facilitative responses were related to lower pain during intercourse
- Higher facilitative responses were related to higher sexual satisfaction, whereas higher negative responses were related to lower sexual satisfaction

What do these results mean?

- Solicitous partner responses may encourage avoidance of all sexual activities, not just intercourse. Solicitousness might also increase certain negative thoughts and emotions that are known to heighten pain during intercourse, such as anxiety, catastrophizing, and focusing more attention on the pain. Although it is not encouraged that women keep engaging in painful intercourse, extensive avoidance of nonpenetrative sexual activities may have consequences beyond increased pain, such as lower feelings of intimacy, and feelings of invalidation and inadequacy in both partners
- Negative partner responses may be interpreted by a woman as a lack of sensitivity and understanding of her

pain experience, contributing to a more negative interaction and leading to lower sexual satisfaction.

- Facilitative partner responses may generate positive thoughts and emotions, including that the pain is manageable and that sexual activities can still be pleasurable, leading to reduced pain and increased sexual satisfaction. These responses may also encourage the couple to focus on pleasurable nonpenetrative activities, which are themselves likely to be more sexually satisfying because they are presumably less or non-painful.

What's the take home message?

Facilitative partner responses may help in alleviating vulvo-vaginal pain and improving sexual satisfaction, whereas solicitous partner responses may

contribute to greater pain and negative partner responses may decrease sexual satisfaction.

Women and partners should work together, possibly with the help of a health care provider, to identify and increase facilitative and decrease solicitous and negative partner responses.

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