

# Sex, Pain, & Endometriosis

## Key Information for Patients

### What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis happens when tissue similar to the uterine lining grows in other places, for example on the abdomen, uterus, ovaries, bladder, or bowel. It affects about 1 in 10 women and also gender diverse people.<sup>1</sup> Symptoms and impact vary widely.

### What are the symptoms of endometriosis?

Endometriosis looks different for everyone, but some common symptoms include:

- Pain felt in the pelvis during periods (dysmenorrhea)
- Persistent or chronic pain felt in the pelvis
- Pain felt during and/or after sex (dyspareunia)
- Pain felt during bowel movements (dyschezia)
- Pain felt during urination (dysuria)
- Difficulty getting pregnant

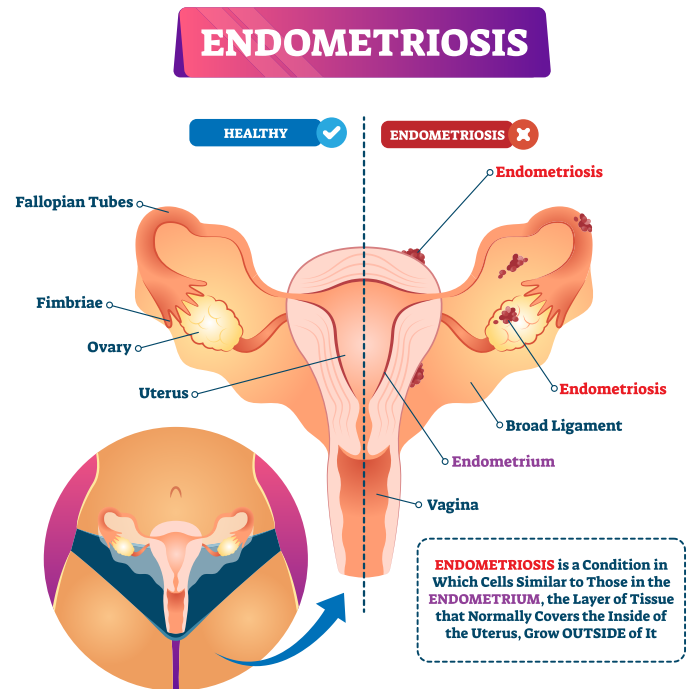


Figure 1. Female pelvic floor

### What is dyspareunia?

The medical term for painful sex is dyspareunia (dis-puh-ROO-nee-uh), defined as persistent or recurrent genital pain that occurs just before, during or after intercourse.<sup>2,3</sup> Talk to your doctor if you're having painful intercourse.

There are two types<sup>4</sup>:

- Deep dyspareunia: Pain during or after penetration, common in people with endometriosis.
- Superficial dyspareunia: Pain at the entrance of the vagina.



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# What causes painful sex if you have endometriosis?

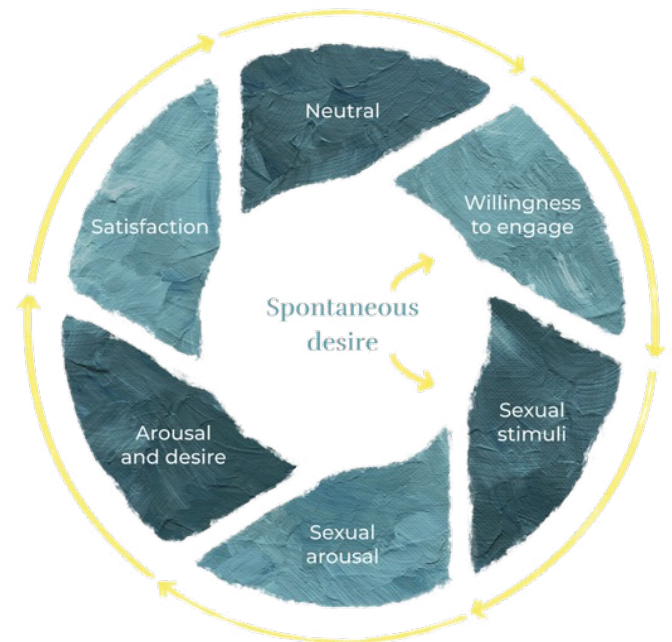
There are many reasons why you may feel pain with sex.

The pain may be caused by the endometriosis lesions themselves, or as a result of nerves that grow around the lesions.<sup>5</sup> If you have chronic pain, your nerves may also become sensitized and result in high levels of pain, even with light touch.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Stress, anxiety, depression, emotions, and experiences can all play a role in painful sex.

The sexual response cycle describes how your emotions might influence your sexual motivation, arousal, and desire.<sup>8</sup>

Painful sex can affect your thoughts, emotions, and experiences which in turn can make your pain better or worse.

If your sexual experiences are painful, this can reinforce negative thoughts and feelings about sex. A pattern of painful experiences might reduce your desire for sex or lead you to avoid it entirely.<sup>8</sup> There are psychological approaches that can help with low arousal and desire.



**Figure 2.** Sexual Response Cycle

## When to seek care

- Sex hurts regularly, during, or after penetration.
- Period pain limits work, school, or daily life.
- You have new or worsening pelvic pain, bleeding, or bladder or bowel symptoms.
- You have been trying to conceive without success and have pelvic pain.

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