



Wendy Trainor
communication and healing

Stress causes sexual disturbances

Sexual difficulties are almost always the result of stress. These stresses may be biological, psychological or socio-cultural in origin. It is often difficult to separate one type of stress from another. That is because there is a complex interaction between our minds and bodies. For example, the couple may be going through a difficult time for any reason: stress at work, a new baby, a death in the family or relationship problems. If the woman is not relaxed she may not be fully lubricated when she and her partner attempt intercourse. She may experience dyspareunia (painful intercourse). The next time they attempt to have intercourse, even if the original stress is resolved, she may feel anxious and be tense in anticipation of the pain. This in and of itself can cause a recurrence of the problem. A vicious cycle can be set up. This cycle can be hard to break.

If individuals can understand that the occasional inability to respond sexually is normal, disturbances are less likely to occur.

Many diseases of the genito-urinary tract can cause pain during intercourse. An examination by a doctor is an important part of the assessment of dyspareunia as well as any other sexual disturbance.

Vaginismus (involuntary spasm of the pelvic floor and perineal muscles that surround the outer third of the vagina), may be related to earlier rape, abortion, painful gynecological examinations or surgery, pelvic disease, relationship problems or general fears about men and/or sexual intercourse. Regardless of the source of the difficulty the contractions cannot be controlled by the woman. The treatment varies with the source of the problem. The source is often difficult to determine.

Vulvodynia (generalized chronic vulvar discomfort: burning, stinging, irritation or rawness) is difficult to assess and treat. It is often difficult to determine the cause of the very real pain that the woman is experiencing. Like many other sexual disturbances, the woman may need to become engaged in therapy to solve the dilemma of why she is experiencing this disturbance. Often a team approach is used involving a gynecologist, pain specialist, physical therapist and a sex therapist to provide the best result.

Women, like men, are often looking for a quick medical fix to their sexual disturbances. Couples are often reluctant to become involved in the therapy necessary to resolve complex problems. They feel uncomfortable at the thought of talking about sexual problems with a therapist. Unfortunately, lack of sex in a

relationship is a predictor of marital breakdown. Therapy can help. It is important for both partners to be willing to work on the issues together. Out of session assignments help couples identify issues, explore their sexuality, and develop more effective ways of relating to each other.

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