

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Returning to Intimacy

Patient Information Leaflet

This leaflet is designed for women having sexual difficulties due to:

- Pelvic floor difficulties, including incontinence and Pelvic Organ Prolapse.
- Gynaecological surgery for whatever reason
- Childbirth, even if the birth was straight forward
- Radiotherapy or Chemotherapy
- menopause and beyond
- Pain
- Trauma

This leaflet has been designed to help you return to a fulfilling and enjoyable intimate relationship.

Sex is important in a lot of relationships. It may be daunting to be sexually active or returning to sexual activity for a number of reasons.

When returning to sex take your time. Keep talking with your partner.

It is advised that you start by enjoying each other's touch. Firstly in a non-sexual way. Massage can be helpful with this, avoiding the breast and genital areas first and then slowly introduce these areas.

Start by exploring non penetrative ways of achieving sexual enjoyment. Clitoral stimulation either manually or orally can help you to progress your intimate relationship. You may find that you can explore what works for you now through masturbation and then communicate to your partner how they can help you achieve climax. You and your partner might find that you need to spend more energy and time on foreplay prior to vaginal penetration in order to achieve climax. Talk this through with your partner to ensure they are aware of your needs.

When thinking about moving towards penetration either by your partner or with aids/toys, you may need to consider things that you didn't before.

Lubrication

Lubrication is something to consider, do you need to use lubrication? And what sort should you use? In many cases both partners will require extra lubrication to maximise comfort.

We advise starting with a water based lubricant first. There are many on the market, such as KY jelly, Optilube or Yes!. You may BOTH need to use lubrication to allow comfortable intercourse.

Lubrication isn't just for sex. The tissues of the vulva and vagina should naturally be moist in order for the tissues to glide as you move. It is therefore recommended if you are experiencing dryness that you moisturise the vulval tissues either with some lubrication or specially designed vaginal moisturiser, such as Yes!, Sylk, Replens, Medihoney or coconut oil.

You may be able to get samples to try before committing to one brand.

<https://www.yesyesyes.org/>

<https://silk.co.uk/>

<https://www.replens.co.uk/our-products>

Please check the ingredients of any lubricant if you have allergies.

Your local pharmacist or healthcare professional can give you further advice if you are unsure.

Positioning

Humans are creatures of habit and sex is no exception. Your favourite position before may now be one that doesn't work for you.

You may feel that you need to be more in control over depth of penetration so need to use positions that allow this or for you to be solely in control of any aids/toys.

You may however, feel that you need to be in a position where the effects of gravity are taken off the pelvic tissue.

Ultimately it is about experimenting with your partner about what will work for you. Keep the communication open between yourself and partner, and most importantly keep it fun. If a position isn't working don't be afraid to say and try another one.

Positioning Suggestions

Described below are some examples of positions that you may find work for you. These can be used by couples of same sex but are predominantly aimed at heterosexual couples. If you feel your needs are not met please do not hesitate to discuss this with your Pelvic Therapist who will be able to guide you further.

The favourite missionary position may no longer be comfortable, try placing pillows under your back/bottom to lift your pelvis higher and lift your legs. This helps to eliminate gravity and take pressure off your pelvic floor. If you find that vaginal penetration is not possible you can use lubrication and allow your partner to use your closed thighs to move their penis between to get a sense of penetration. This allows you and/or your partner to use breast and clitoral stimulation for your enjoyment.

'Spooning' is a much loved position. This can be modified if you are unable to have vaginal penetration. By using lubrication you can allow your partner to use your closed thighs to move their penis between to get a sense of penetration. This allows you and/or your partner to use breast and clitoral stimulation for your enjoyment.

Certain positions where you can be more in control of depth may require a certain amount of flexibility and strength (being the dominant partner on top facing towards or away). Have fun trying, use support if you need. You can try with your partner sitting on a chair or sofa if you find kneeling difficult.

Further Help

You can use your hands, thighs or positions to help control the depth of penetration to relieve discomfort. If you find that you are still struggling to be able to reduce the depth of penetration by your partner there are aids on the market to help with this. An example of these are the Ohnuts.

<https://ohnut.co/>

You may be recommended to use vaginal dilators to help with vaginal tissue sensitivity, vaginal scar tissue management or vaginal tissue elasticity. Vaginal dilators can also help with relaxation of the pelvic floor. These should be used with guidance from your therapist or healthcare professional.

You may wish to explore anal intercourse as a safe alternative to vaginal intercourse, remember to lubricate well.

Remember, it may take time to return to a fully active intimate relationship and it may be very different to how it was. Ultimately whatever your intimate relationship looks like it needs to be fulfilling for you and your partner.

You may find it helpful to share this leaflet with your partner and work through it together.

If you require further assistance please talk to your health care professional.

Further links

<https://sbuhb.nhs.wales/community-services/primary-care/sexual-health/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-body/sexual-health/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/sexual-health/why-does-sex-hurt/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/female-sexual-problems/>

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