

What is Female Sexual Dysfunction?

Female Sexual Dysfunction (FSD) is persistent, recurrent, problems with sexual response or desire that is distressing you or straining to your relationship with your partner.

Many women experience problems with sexual function at some point in their lives. FSD can occur at all stages of life, and it may be ongoing or happen only once in a while.

You may experience more than one type of female sexual dysfunction. Types include:

- **Low sexual desire**- You have lack of sexual desire or interest in sex.
- **Sexual arousal disorder**- Your desire for sex might be intact, but you have difficulty or are unable to become aroused or maintain arousal during sexual activity.
- **Orgasmic disorder**- You have persistent or recurrent difficulty in achieving orgasm.
- **Sexual pain disorder**- You have pain associated with sexual stimulation or vaginal contact.

What Causes Female Sexual Dysfunction?

Several factors contribute to sexual dissatisfaction or dysfunction which tend to be interrelated:

Physical Factors- Examples of physical conditions that may contribute to sexual problems include arthritis, urinary or bowel difficulties, pelvic surgery, fatigue, headaches, other pain problems, and neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis. Certain medications, including some antidepressants, blood pressure medications, antihistamines, and chemotherapy drugs, can decrease your sex drive and your body's ability to experience orgasm.

Hormonal Factors- Hormones play an important role in regulating sexual function in women. As you age, your body's production of hormones declines, which can contribute to a change in sexual function. For example, your body produces less estrogen, which leads to poor vaginal lubrication and decreased genital sensation. Further, research suggests that low levels of the hormone testosterone also contribute to a decline in sexual arousal, genital sensation, and orgasm.

Psychological and Social Factors- These include work-related stress and anxiety, concern about sexual performance, marital or relationship problems, depression,

feelings of guilt, and the effects of a past sexual trauma.

How is Female Sexual Dysfunction Diagnosed?

To diagnose FSD, your doctor will:

- **Discuss your sexual and medical history.** You might be uneasy talking with your doctor about such personal matters, but your sexuality is a key part of your well-being. The more forthcoming you can be about your sexual history and current problems, the better your chances of finding an effective approach to treating them.
- **Perform a pelvic exam.** During the exam, your doctor checks for physical changes that affect your sexual enjoyment, such as thinning of your genital tissues, decreased skin elasticity, scarring, or pain.

How is Female Sexual Dysfunction Treated?

Medication Therapy

Compounded medications for each type of FSD is available. Some of which include using hormone therapies to treat vaginal tone and elasticity. Other compounded medications are available to help with your mood and desire, lack of orgasm or lack in intensity in orgasm, and pain. Each medication has its own inherent risks, so it's important that you speak with your doctor or pharmacist about any concerns you may have.

Lifestyle and Home Remedies

To boost your sexual health, practice these healthy lifestyle habits:

- **Avoid excessive alcohol**- Too much alcohol reduces sexual responsiveness.
- **Avoid smoking**- Cigarette smoking restricts blood flow to your sexual organs, decreasing sexual arousal.
- **Be physically active**- Regular physical activity can increase your stamina and elevate your mood, enhancing romantic feelings.
- **Make time for leisure and relaxation**- Learn ways to decrease stress, and allow yourself to relax. Being relaxed can enhance your ability to focus on your sexual experiences, and may help you attain more satisfying arousal and orgasm.

What is Pelvic Pain?

Pelvic pain is a general term used to describe pain in the region of the body from the "belly-button" to the mid-thigh. Pelvic pain is common among women of all ages, and can affect men as well. The origin and intensity may vary, and it can be difficult to identify the exact cause. Pelvic pain is categorized as acute (meaning the pain is sudden and severe) or chronic (lasting over a period of months or longer). It is common for people suffering from pelvic pain to experience symptoms from more than one area in the pelvic region such as:

Bladder- Urinary frequency and urgency, pain

Bowel- Irritable bowel syndrome

Vaginal- Pain, itching, burning, or sensitivity

Vulvar- Pain, burning, or itching

Lower Back and/or Lower Abdomen- Pain, pressure

Reproductive Organs- Pain

How is Pelvic Pain Diagnosed?

You doctor will likely begin with very detailed discussion of your pain to better understand its nature. As with most diagnoses, a thorough physical exam is also performed. For women, this often includes a pelvic exam, similar to a gynecological exam. Depending on your symptoms, your doctor will check the muscles around the pelvis, the physical attributes of your vulva and vagina, and abnormal sensations such as tingling, numbness, or pain. Your doctor may also order tests such as cultures, urinalysis, cystoscopy, blood tests, imaging tests, or a biopsy.

How is Pelvic Pain Treated?

Treatment for pelvic pain often includes both medication and physical therapy. Compounded medications are often used as they can be custom formulated for your individual symptoms. Additionally, medications can be made for topical application directly to the area needing to be treated. Common medications used in compounded formulas for pelvic pain include: analgesics, muscle relaxants, hormones, steroids, and antidepressants.

Physical therapy is often very helpful for treating pelvic pain. A physical therapist knowledgeable in treating pelvic pain can work with you on stretching, massage, and strengthening exercises for your pelvic floor muscles. Other types of treatments include trigger point injections to help your pelvic floor muscles relax, yoga, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and counseling.

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Female Sexual Function Quiz

Over the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel sexual desire or interest?

- Almost always or always
- Most times (more than half the time)
- Sometimes (about half the time)
- A few times (less than half the time)
- Almost never or never

Over the past 4 weeks, how would you rate your level of sexual desire or interest?

- Very high
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very low or none at all

Over the past 4 weeks, how often have you been satisfied with your arousal during sexual activity or intercourse?

- No sexual activity
- Almost always or always
- Most times (more than half the time)
- Sometimes (about half the time)
- A few times (less than half the time)
- Almost never or never

Over the past 4 weeks, how difficult was it to become lubricated until completion of sexual activity or intercourse?

- No sexual activity
- Almost always or always
- Most times (more than half the time)
- Sometimes (about half the time)
- A few times (less than half the time)
- Almost never or never

Over the past 4 weeks, when you had sexual stimulation or intercourse, how often did you reach orgasm?

- No sexual activity
- Almost always or always
- Most times (more than half the time)
- Sometimes (about half the time)
- A few times (less than half the time)
- Almost never or never

Over the past 4 weeks, how satisfied were you with your ability to reach orgasm during sexual activity or intercourse?

- No sexual activity
- Very satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- About equally satisfied
- Moderately dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Over the past 4 weeks, how often did you experience discomfort or pain during vaginal penetration?

- Did not attempt intercourse
- Almost always or always
- Most times (more than half the time)
- Sometimes (about half the time)
- A few times (less than half the time)
- Almost never



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References:

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 Female sexual dysfunction. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2015, from <http://mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/female-sexual-dysfunction/basics/treatment/con-20027721>

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Understanding Female Sexual Dysfunction and Pelvic Pain

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