



# VULVOVAGINAL DISORDERS

## A PATHWAY TO DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

### GUIDELINES FOR SEX WHEN YOU ARE HAVING DISCOMFORT OR PAIN

- It is important not to engage in sexual activity when you are uncomfortable. Discomfort and pain are signals from the body that something is not right. Sometimes this discomfort will be temporary, but sometimes, the discomfort will grow and you may need treatment.
- Sex can make your symptoms worse. You need time to heal.
- If you keep having sex despite having pain, your body may rebel by turning off your sex drive and causing your pelvic floor muscles to tense up, making intercourse impossible. Fear of having pain may do the same thing.
- If you happen to have something that can pass to your partner, it is more likely to happen if you have sex when you are symptomatic.
- Open communication with your partner will clear up misunderstandings.
- Make sure you are using appropriate contraception if you do not want to become pregnant.
- Make sure you are using appropriate protection (condoms) when indicated.
- There are many ways to be intimate without vaginal penetration. These alternative techniques may help “tide you over” in your relationship.
- Pain with penetration has many causes. Sometimes, we can help to “fix” a vulvovaginal condition, at which time, any pain you are having also improves. But, sometimes, pain lingers, despite treatment, because of the effect of inflammation, trauma, tight muscles, etc, on the nerve endings. This can take some time, and experimentation with different therapeutic options, to improve.
- If the level of pain that you have is acceptable to you, once your condition has been treated appropriately, a small amount of lubricant may help with penetration. Oil-based lubricants like scent-free baby oil, almond oil, coconut oil, or other oils, can make sex more comfortable but should not be used with latex condoms. Water-based lubricants such as Astroglide® or Slippery Stuff® or Pre-Seed® are safer to use with condoms.
- Changing positions during penetrative sex may also help. You will have to find what works for you.
- Your doctor may prescribe an anesthetic ointment such as Lidocaine 2% jelly or 5% ointment to help numb the vaginal opening to reduce your pain, and therefore, your fear of pain. The ointment or gel (about 1 teaspoon or less) is applied just inside the vaginal opening and left in place for at least 10 minutes, preferably 15, prior to attempting intercourse. A small cotton ball applied against the vaginal opening gently will prevent the medication from dripping out. Don't put any on the clitoris at the top of the vaginal opening. The medication may temporarily cause stinging, for about one minute, then it will numb the skin. Wipe it off before having sex. Use a lubricant, if you wish.
- There are many approaches to helping with sexual pain. Please ask for help from your health care provider if you need it.