Vulvar Pain and Sexuality

Vulvar pain conditions are uniquely challenging. Few pain conditions interfere with one’s life as intimately as does vulvar pain. Women frequently find that sexual activities are painful and difficult, both for themselves and for their partners. Strains can develop within the relationship as a result of this condition. Problematic patterns of behavior between the partners may develop (such as avoiding sexual exchanges), which may result in each person feeling lonely. We hope that this handout will help you to feel supported. It may also give you and your partner an opportunity to talk together about your sexual relationship and to develop ways to stay connected emotionally as well as sexually/sensually during the course of your evaluation and treatment.

We have found that there are several common sexual responses to vulvar pain, where both partners feel like there are only “Two Crummy Choices”. These “choices” are: she can continue to be sexual and have pain - and feel resentful, OR she can avoid being sexual - and feel guilty. Her partner can continue to initiate sexual encounters - and feel guilty, OR her partner can avoid sexual sharing - and feel resentful. Both “choices” can precipitate feelings of isolation and loneliness due to decreased intimacy and connection. This can lead to difficulty with lubrication and desire for women and erectile and ejaculatory problems for men.

It is not uncommon for women with vulvar pain conditions to find that they develop another condition, levator muscle pain otherwise known as vaginismus, as a result of the vulvar and sexual pain. In the next pages is a graphic of the “vicious cycle” of sexual pain. It is also called the LAMONT MODEL of sexual pain.

Although many couples enjoy penile-vaginal intercourse as part of their sexual repertoire, sexual expression and intimacy can include many other activities that are gratifying and pleasurable. The Erotica Menu is a list of ways to share sexual exchanges, and may be helpful for the couple experiencing pain. Listed below are some suggestions for approaching being sexual with your partner.

1. Take a few minutes to read through the Erotica Menu. Realize that this menu includes many different ways to have sexual exchange. Some may be better suited for you than others.
2. Then take a moment to think about this question. Talk with your partner about your thoughts:

   “Is there is any sexual or sensual activity where I am confident that I can be comfortable and pain-free? What are they?”
3. Talk, share, and instruct one another about what is and what could be comfortable sexual and sensual encounters.


5. Use a lubricant liberally (Astroglide, Slippery Stuff, Wet, Probe). For couples who do not use condoms, oil may be helpful (olive oil, mineral oil, etc).

6. Stress reduction and methods for calming the body and the mind can help keep the physical, emotional and mental self stay healthy.

7. Remember to verbalize your hopes, desires, frustrations and dreams with your partner. This can help you to maintain your connection with one another.