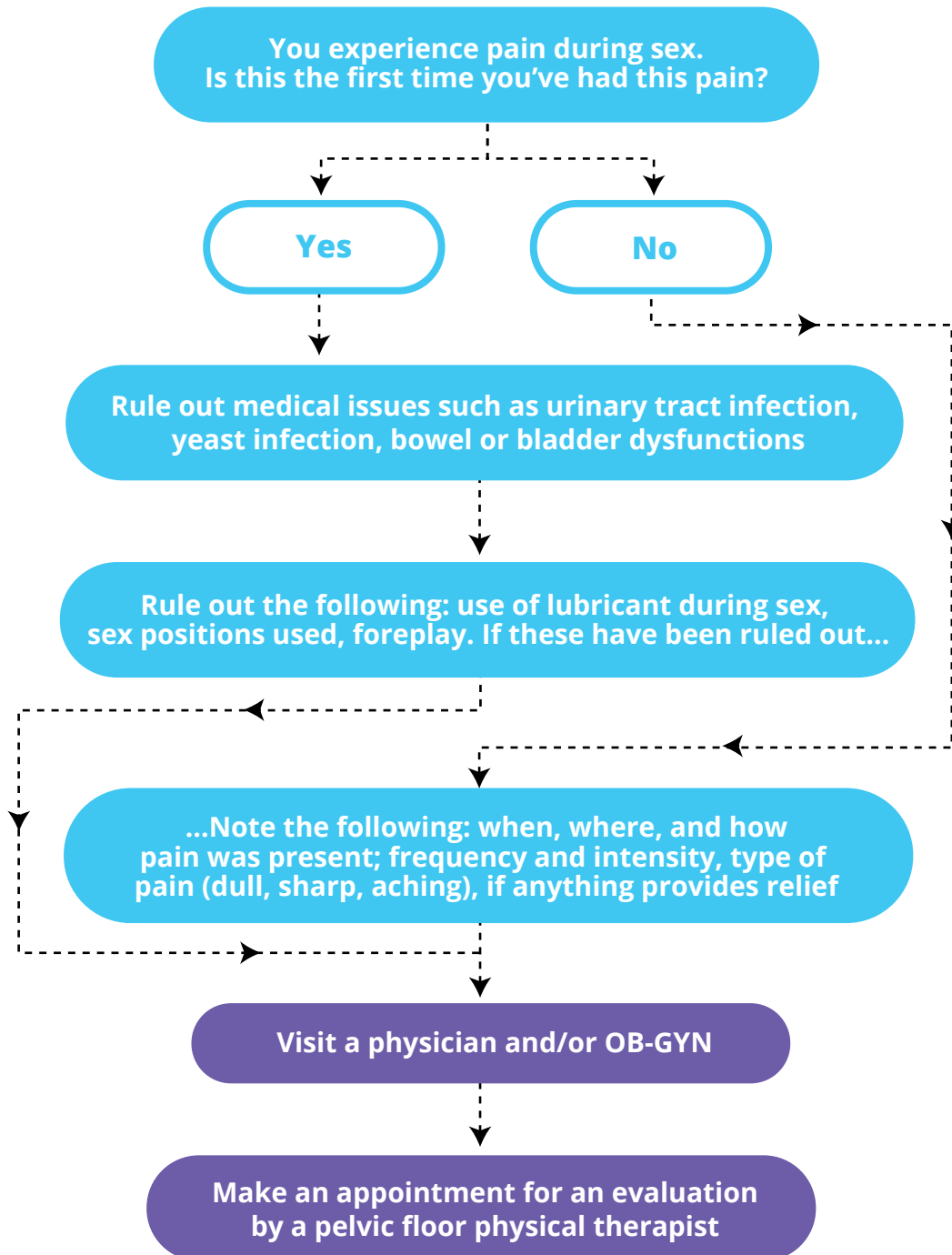


PELVIC FLOOR & SEXUAL DYSFUNCTIONS

Pelvic floor dysfunction is an umbrella term for a variety of disorders that occur when pelvic floor muscles and ligaments are impaired. Pelvic floor muscles are the layer of muscles that support the pelvic organs (i.e. bladder, bowel and the uterus in women) and span the bottom of the pelvis; they are also connected to surrounding abdominal, hip, and lower back muscles. Common symptoms of dysfunction can include pelvic pain, pressure, pain during sex, incontinence, incomplete emptying of the bladder, and visible organ protrusion.



TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

If you have frequent or severe pain during sex, you should see an obstetrician–gynecologist (OB-GYN) or other health care professional. It is important to rule out gynecologic conditions that may be causing your pain. Your OB-GYN or other health care professional also can help you address problems with sexual response. (Preparing for a visit with an OB-GYN: <http://bit.ly/OBGYNvisit>)

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist (PT): If gynecological medical issues have been ruled out or your OB-GYN isn't sure why you're experiencing pain, a good next step would be to seek an evaluation by a Pelvic Floor Physical Therapist (PT).

What Causes Pelvic Floor and Sexual Dysfunctions? Almost all pelvic pain syndromes involve some kind of neuromuscular issue; that is, a problem with the muscles, nerves, and connective tissue of the pelvic floor and adjacent areas. A pelvic floor physical therapist (PT) is trained in evaluating and treating pelvic floor dysfunctions. <http://bit.ly/PelvicPainSession>

Your PT will provide insights into what's causing your symptoms through two main methods: gaining a thorough understanding of the history and context of your pelvic pain, and a physical examination of the pelvic floor area. It can take time to become comfortable with your PT, especially during the initial sessions, so you have the right to take breaks and express to them if you're experiencing anxiety or discomfort. Ask your PT for more information about your treatment plan, since the more empowered you are about your body, the better the outcomes for healing and treatment.

OTHER THERAPEUTIC CONSIDERATIONS

The impacts of pelvic floor disorders and sexual dysfunctions are beyond the physical. They have far-reaching consequences on emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual wellbeing. These recommendations may fulfil a holistic approach to receiving treatment: Individual counseling, couples counseling, sex therapy, and craniosacral therapy.

The latter two are less known modes of therapy. Sex therapists are licensed mental health professionals, trained to provide in-depth psychotherapy, who have specialized in treating clients with sexual issues and concerns. They are certified, registered, or clinical members of a national psychotherapy organization. Sex therapists work with simple sexual concerns also, but where appropriate, are prepared to provide comprehensive and intensive psychotherapy over an extended period of time in more complex cases. If cultural and religious sensitivity are important to this process, reach out to the sex therapist about their training and experience in these areas.



Craniosacral therapy is a gentle, noninvasive form of bodywork that addresses the bones of the head, spinal column and sacrum. The goal is to release compression in those areas which alleviates stress and pain. by influencing the cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord.

SELF-CARE CONSIDERATIONS

- **Re-route your thoughts by using mantras.** Some days may be harder than others. It can be challenging to not constantly think about your pain. One advice therapists recommend is the use of a few mantras to gently re-route your thoughts towards those that are more kind and productive. For example: “I am not a sexual problem, I am a sexual being” and “My body has the capability to feel pleasure”
- **Schedule time for self-care.** Once you start therapy and treatment, you may feel overwhelmed with how much time and energy this takes. It’s important to also schedule self-care time into your days. Reflect on what self-care means to you and the activities that bring you a sense of calm and revitalization.
- **Identify individuals you trust for support.** It takes a village to work through challenging times, and working through sexual dysfunction is no different. Identify a few individuals you feel completely trustworthy with and who can act as your support. They will be the ones you reach out during more challenging times, and they will also celebrate your successes.
- **Set boundaries for yourself and for others.** Cultural and religious pressures may come into your world. For example, if you are married and child-bearing questions are raised; or if you are around other friends/family members where women are pregnant and having children, and you internalize your situation as shameful. You have the right to not explain things to those you don’t want to and to gently set up boundaries for against questions and remarks. Perhaps practice a few phrases, such as “That’s a personal decision we’ve already made”, or “Things happen on their own time.”
- **Do what works best for you.** Additional self-care practices such as guided meditation, diaphragmatic breathing, and gentle yoga classes may support a well-rounded self-care plan.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Pelvic Health and Rehabilitation Center: <https://www.pelvicpainrehab.com/>
- “Pelvic Pain Explained” - Stephanie A. Prendergast and Elizabeth H. Rummer
- “Come As You Are” - Emily Nagoski
- Vaginal dilator guide (if applicable) - <http://bit.ly/DilatorGuide>
- Find a Pelvic Floor PT: <http://bit.ly/PelvicHealthProfessional>
- American Physical Therapy Association: Find a Pelvic Floor PT: <http://bit.ly/APTALocator>

