



# Vaginismus

## What is Vaginismus?

Vaginismus is the involuntarily or persistent contraction of the vaginal muscles when attempting penetration. This can prevent sexual intercourse, or it can make it very painful.

This can happen:

- When inserting a tampon
- When touched near the vaginal area
- As a partner attempts penetration

There is no known number of individuals with this dysfunction, however, it is considered to be uncommon.

## Vaginismus is Classified into Two Types:

*Primary vaginismus:* When vaginal penetration has never been achieved.

*Secondary vaginismus:* When vaginal penetration was once achieved, but is no longer possible, potentially due to factors such as gynecologic surgery, trauma, radiation, etc.

## What are the Symptoms of Vaginismus?

The primary symptom of vaginismus is the involuntary tightening of the vaginal muscles, making penetration either difficult or impossible. The severity of the condition varies between individuals.

Other symptoms may include the fear of vaginal penetration and decreased sexual desire related to penetration. Individuals often report a burning or stinging pain when anything is inserted into the vagina.

## **How is Vaginismus Diagnosed?**

The diagnosis of vaginismus usually begins by the individual describing their symptoms, including when you first noticed a problem, how often it occurs, and what seems to trigger it.

Generally, a pelvic exam is required in order to diagnose and treat the dysfunction. During the exam, your doctor will look for any sign of infection or scarring. Given that with vaginismus, there is no physical reason for the vaginal muscles to contract, if that is your diagnosis that would mean that the doctor did not find another cause for your symptoms.

## **What are the Causes of Vaginismus?**

There is not always a reason for vaginismus. Although in some cases there has been a link to past sexual abuse, trauma, painful intercourse, and emotional factors, in other situations there is no direct cause to be found.

## **How is Vaginismus Treated?**

Thankfully, vaginismus is a treatable disorder. This typically includes education, counselling, and/or exercises.

***Sex therapy and counseling:*** This form of education typically involves learning about your anatomy and what happens during intercourse, as well as learning about the muscles involved in vaginismus. This is to help you understand how the different parts of your body work and how your body is responding. Counseling may or may not involve your partner(s).

***Vaginal dilators:*** If recommended, an individual will learn to use a vaginal dilator with the supervision of a professional. The dilator is cone shaped and is placed inside the vagina to help the vaginal muscles stretch and become flexible. Gradually, the dilators will get bigger. To increase intimacy, a partner may help you insert the dilator. After completing the course of treatment with a set of dilators, you may begin to try and have intercourse again.

***Kegel exercises:*** Kegel exercises consist of repeatedly tightening and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles. Practicing these exercises will help to control when your muscles contract and relax.

## **What are the Complications of Vaginismus?**

The biggest concern for most individuals with this disorder is the impact that it may have on their relationship(s). Ways to lessen the toll on the relationship include:

- being proactive
- getting treatment
- talking to your partner(s) about your feelings and fears
  - receiving treatment from a sex therapist
- using lubrication and/or certain sexual positions to help make intercourse more comfortable

It is important to remember that there is nothing to be ashamed of and that many people with this dysfunction recover and go on to live happy sexual lives.

If you have any further questions regarding vaginismus or would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

## **Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!**

**Location:**

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

**Hours:**

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am – 4:30pm

**Phone:**

709-579-1009

Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS

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**Revised July 2020**