Pain during first penetration... Something wrong? Will it ever feel good? [1]

(1)
Dear Alice,

I have never had sex, but I have tried now twice with my boyfriend, and it has been incredibly painful. It felt like there was a barrier inside me, and the second time I bled. I feel like I am relaxed, and my boyfriend is very gentle and slow, but it still really hurts? more than I think it should. I am able to use tampons ? I'm not that small ? but I don't know what the problem is. Is it supposed to hurt this much? Could there be something wrong?

? Penetration?

(2)
Dear Alice,

I'm a virgin, and the first time my boyfriend inserted his fingers in my vagina, it hurt a lot, and I got sore down there. I didn't reach an orgasm, but faked it so he would stop. I didn't enjoy it at all and I was wondering... is this going to happen when I have sex? Is it going to be as disappointing?

?Touched by a finger...

Answer

Dear Penetration? and Touched by a finger...,

While your experience may have been a bit more "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and less "Stairway to Heaven," it's good that you're in touch with how you feel both physically and emotionally. Just like other areas of self-discovery and understanding of your romantic relationship, taking time to reflect on your physical and emotional responses to sexual activities and increasing communication with your partner may help you develop a healthy sexual awareness and sense of what you want (and don't want) moving forward.

Soreness and/or pain from insertive/penetrative sexual play can happen for a variety of reasons and can happen to anyone. It's hard to predict what your future sexual experiences will feel like, but hopefully understanding how to prevent soreness and pain can help you
experiment with options to increase your enjoyment.

To reduce discomfort and get the good vibes going, here are some tips for you next foray:

- **Take it slow.** If vaginal penetration is new for you, it can be completely normal to feel discomfort. Some people who have never had experience with vaginal penetration before may have initial pain or soreness due to the breaking of the hymen, a thin membrane in the vaginal canal. That said, if the sensation is not pleasurable or you are not enjoying yourself, you may want to consider slowing down, taking a pause, or changing what you are doing. It’s also always okay to stop during sex if it doesn’t feel right for you. First sex for two virgins also discusses some reasons for why sex can be uncomfortable for the first time.

- **Have a sex talk.** Talking to your partner can help him understand what feels better for you and what you are comfortable with in your sexual exploration together. Consider having a chat during a designated time (outside of the bedroom) to help set mutual expectations and avoid any pressure when you’re intimate together. You can also talk about what does or does not feel good during sex play. While it can feel awkward to talk directly and openly during intimate moments, sometimes just acknowledging those awkward feelings can help break the ice and help you feel safe enough to try new things. One way to initiate talking during sex is to ask, “How does this feel?” and “Is this okay with you?” Some other examples for letting your beau know what you like and don’t like during sex are “Yes, that feels good, stay there;” or, if you’re starting to feel some discomfort, “Could you go a little slower, please?”

- **Mix it up.** Some ways to increase comfort with penetration can include incorporating a lubricant, experimenting with various types of foreplay to enhance arousal (which can increase your body’s natural lubrication), or trying different positions or sexual techniques. As an example, Touched by a finger..., your boyfriend can start off with one lubed finger, inserting it gently and slowly. Once you feel comfortable, speed and intensity can be increased gradually, or not at all, and another finger or two can be added.

- **Refocus your pleasure.** While an orgasm does not always have to be the end result or goal of sex, it can certainly add to your enjoyment! Clitoral stimulation, on its own or in combination with penetrative sex play, may also increase arousal and the likelihood of having an orgasm. You can also peruse the Go Ask Alice! Orgasm archive to learn more about achieving orgasms during different types of sexual stimulation.

If pain or discomfort with penetration continues, consider talking with a health care provider about what you are experiencing. S/he will be able to investigate any possible underlying causes for the pain.

Also keep in mind that not enjoying penetration for the first time does not necessarily mean you won’t enjoy your next sexual experience or first sexual intercourse, when you’re ready. Uncovering what you enjoy sexually may take some patience and experimentation; try not to rush or put pressure on yourself. Each person’s sexual desire and response is unique. By allowing yourself and your boyfriend some time for practice backstage, hopefully you’ll both be in tune with your partners for your next rock ‘n’ roll performance— and perhaps come back for an encore.

Alice!

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Published date:
Sep 12, 2003
Last reviewed on:
Mar 27, 2015