Dear Alice,

I've had sex and I really wish that I'd never done it. I didn't really enjoy it, either. It really hurt and I said I'd never do it again. Will I enjoy it next time?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You are not alone in how you feel about your sexual experience. Many people feel ambivalent about the choices they've made about sex. Intercourse can be complicated because it has the potential to be thrilling, mediocre, anxiety-provoking, calming, all of the above, or none of the above. If we based our opinions about sex on portrayals in magazines, movies, television, and songs, we would likely think of it as always passionate and safe with few negative emotional or physical consequences. But as you've pointed out, this is not so?sex can also cause regret, confusion, and anxiety about future encounters.

Reflecting on what led you to have sex might offer some insight into how you feel about being sexually active. People have sex for a number of reasons:

- They crave the physical pleasure with another person.
- They want to please another person.
- They feel they ?owe? it to someone else.
- They're curious about what it would feel like.
- They love someone and want to feel closer to them.
- Or a whole host of other reasons and combinations of the above.

Your motivations for having sex could certainly affect your experience of it. For example, consider how different it would be to have sex because you're really turned on and in love with your partner versus wanting to please someone else?

Other factors to consider about why your experience was unpleasant:

- How comfortable did you feel with your sexual partner socially and emotionally?
- Did you discuss and/or use a birth control? Were you nervous about that?
- Did you experience pressure from your partner or friends?
- Were you sufficiently lubricated and turned on?
Any or all of these concerns could have made the sex less enjoyable. You also mentioned that sex hurt. If this was the first time you had sex, a number of reasons could account for the pain. If you’re a woman, the hymen (a thin skin at the entrance of the vagina) can stretch or tear the first time you have sex, which can cause some discomfort or pain. Another possibility is inadequate vaginal lubrication. If women are not sufficiently aroused, or if their vaginas are dry because of the current stage of their menstrual cycles, then the body won’t produce enough lubrication to make penetration comfortable and pleasurable. If you are interested in having sex in the future, you might try buying an over-the-counter water-based lube to help increase wetness and pleasure. It's also possible your partner may have been using too much pressure, over-stimulating your clitoris, or just plain going at it in a way that wasn't right for you. Painful sex [2] and Hymen stretching [3] in the Go Ask Alice! archives have more information about the hymen and other potential causes of painful intercourse. But to answer part of your question, in general, women do seem to find sex less painful and more pleasurable after their first few experiences.

If you’re a man, and you had difficulty entering your partner, your penis may have bent or “folded,” which can cause pain. This usually happens when the penis is not fully erect during attempts to penetrate. During anal sex, the receiving partner can feel discomfort because there is little natural lubrication around the anus. Also, sometimes the inserting partner’s skin can get irritated. Here again, water-based lubes can really help. Whether you're a man or a woman, if you still have pain the next time you choose to have sex and none of these seem to apply to you, then a visit with your health care provider may be in order.

Doing some reading can also build your understanding of your own body and what you may or may not like to explore sexually. The following resources may also offer information and insight for your future sexual experiences:

- My Sex Professor
- Sex, Etc. -- A web site by teens for teens [5]
- Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health archives [6], especially the related questions linked at the bottom of this answer.

Although sex can be confusing, it can also be pleasurable and wonderful if both partners feel ready and mutually consent. Sex is personal: the choice of how and when to be sexually active is yours alone to make. And, as you’ve mentioned, you can always change your mind.

Alice!
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