



Sexual Dysfunction Association

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Sex therapy is also known as psychosexual therapy, or PST for short

Why would anyone go for sex therapy?

Sexual difficulties are common and have many causes, including physical (the result of illness, disability or certain medications), psychological and emotional. Sometimes they are situational – that is, they only happen under certain circumstances. Most often, they come about through a combination of factors. It may be a problem you've always had, or it may have developed suddenly and without any obvious reason.

It can be hard to talk about sexual problems, even with our partners, and yet many of us go through periods when our sex lives are much less enjoyable than they could be. If we find we can't solve these difficulties on our own, they may start to affect the quality of our relationships, and this can cause a great deal of worry and unhappiness.

These are some of the reasons why you might go to see a sex therapist:

- ?? You find you no longer seem to desire sex, even though you might sometimes 'want to want' it.
- ?? You have problems getting aroused. For men, this may mean problems getting or maintaining an erection; for women, a lack of physical enjoyment or lubrication.
- ?? You find it difficult or impossible to reach orgasm/the point of ejaculation.
- ?? You ejaculate (come) before you want to, leaving you and/or your partner dissatisfied.
- ?? You find penetration painful or impossible.
- ?? There are issues from your past that are stopping you from being able to enjoy sexual relationships in the present, such as a sexual trauma, or negative childhood messages about sex.

Who are sex therapists?

Sex therapists are counsellors or medical professionals who have undertaken additional training in what makes for good sexual relationships, and what treatments work when things go wrong. They are specially trained to be both knowledgeable and comfortable with talking about sex.

What kind of people do sex therapists see?

Sex therapy is open to adults of all ages: lesbian, gay, bisexual or straight; married or unmarried. If you have a current sexual partner, it's generally best if you attend sessions together, because sexual and relationship difficulties rarely (if ever) 'belong' to one partner or the other. If you don't have a sexual partner at this time, or s/he is not willing to attend, you may still find it helpful to attend sessions on your own.

What does sex therapy involve?

Your therapist will understand that it has taken a lot of courage to seek help. He or she will offer a safe and supportive environment to find out what is going wrong in your sex life, and to discuss possible solutions. If you have a partner, it can also be a good opportunity to work on other kinds of difficulties in your relationship, such as poor communication.

The first few sessions will involve taking a detailed history of the problem and how it affects you and/or your relationship. Your therapist will give you information about how sexual problems arise and tell you about the various treatment options available. These might include one or a combination of the following:

- ?? Sex education aimed at banishing sexual myths, perhaps using books or videos.
- ?? Helping you to improve your communication skills within the relationship – for instance, how to handle conflict or how to be clearer about what you want.
- ?? A 'personal growth programme' which will help you to become more familiar and comfortable with your body and your sexual self.
- ?? A series of sensual touching exercises to carry out with your partner.
- ?? Specific exercises linked to particular problems, such as the 'stop start' technique for rapid ejaculation (coming too quickly).
- ?? Helping you and your partner manage differences in sexual appetite, motivation or preferences.
- ?? For men with erectile problems there are physical treatments such as a vacuum pump or medicines such as Viagra. There are also physical treatments and medications for women with specific sexual difficulties, particularly those concerning painful penetration.

Please be assured that you will never be asked to undress or carry out intimate exercises in the therapy room.

How do I obtain sex therapy?

The two main routes are through the NHS or privately, depending on whether you are able and willing to pay. Private treatment will generally cost between £30 - 50 per session (£45 - £100 in London), but you are likely to be seen quickly, and can choose who you see. You may have to join a lengthy waiting list for NHS treatment, but it will be free (although you will have to pay for any prescriptions, unless you have specific medical conditions which mean you are exempt).

The NHS

Services vary widely across the UK but, depending on where you live, there may be sex therapy services available from the local Family Planning Clinic, Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic or from a Psychosexual Unit within larger hospitals.

It is often a good idea to start with your GP: book a double appointment to give you time to talk about the problem without feeling too rushed. Otherwise, look in *Yellow Pages* or on your local Health Authority website for information about Psychosexual Services.

Private

If you would like to find an independent sex therapy practitioner, the best place to start is the British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy (BASRT). Click on 'Therapists' at their website www.basrt.org.uk to search for practitioners in your area, or telephone them on **020 8543 2707**.

More detailed information about individual therapists can be found at the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP) website www.bacp.co.uk.

If you live in Scotland, you can find information about local sex therapists from Couple Counselling Scotland at www.couplecounselling.org. Sex therapy is also available from many Relate centres – see their website www.relate.org.uk for the nearest one to you that offers sex therapy.

Whoever you see, make sure they have specific recognised qualifications in sex therapy and that they abide by the codes of ethics of an appropriate professional body.

Sexual problems can make you feel very alone – but they are much more common than you probably realise. If they're affecting you, why not think about getting some help?

An invitation

..... to enrol as a friend of The Sexual Dysfunction Association. For a small annual subscription you will know that you are contributing to a charity that helps overcome the problems of male and female sexual dysfunction. If you are interested please telephone or write for an application form or complete our on-line registration form.

