

## **What is Vaginismus**

Vaginismus is an involuntary spasm (squeezing together) of the muscles of the lower end of the vagina. This condition causes penetration to be difficult and painful, or even impossible.

It happens because instead of relaxing the muscles tense up. A woman with vaginismus can't control when the muscles will spasm. It can happen when she is trying to have sex or when she is having a medical examination, like a pap smear.

The spasm can be so strong that nothing can go into the vagina and she feels pain when trying to put anything into the vagina (including fingers, tampons, penis or speculum for pap smears).

When there is an attempt at putting something into the vagina the woman becomes anxious, the muscles tense up and it is painful. Not surprisingly, this leads to further anxiety the next time and the same thing happening again.

The anxiety can be caused by inexperience with sex, not having enough privacy to relax or pain from another cause such as an infection. Sometimes there are traumatic past memories like rape or sexual assault. If this has happened to you counselling can also help to deal with these issues. There can also be no obvious cause and yet the muscle spasm still happens.

Vaginismus does not mean that women cannot achieve or sustain sexual arousal. Many are very sexually responsive and may have orgasms through clitoral stimulation. Women with vaginismus may seek sexual contact and sexual play as long as vaginal penetration is avoided.

The treatment of choice with vaginismus is program that combines education, including information about sexual anatomy, physiology, the sexual response cycle, and common myths about sex, counselling and exercises. Exercises include pelvic floor muscle contraction and relaxation (Kegel exercises) to improve voluntary control of the muscles.