

Is sex still painful years after childbirth?

Taking a closer look at persistent postpartum pain during intercourse.

> [J Sex Med.](#) 2022 Jan;19(1):116-131. doi: 10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.11.004. Epub 2021 Dec 6.

Comparing Self-Reported Pain During Intercourse and Pain During a Standardized Gynecological Exam at 12- and 24-Month Postpartum

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Swipe through and we'll
break down our findings!



For **12% of women**, postpartum pain during sex lasts longer than **12 months**.



We wanted to know:

1

The **characteristics** of this pain at 12- and 24-months postpartum;

2

The **biological** and **psychosocial factors** that might be involved, and;

3

Whether pain reported during sex **was similar** to pain experienced during gynaecological exams.

What we did:

We recruited women from the IWK Health Centre.



They completed online surveys and a gynaecological exam at 12- and 24-months postpartum.



Participants were divided into minimal pain and significant pain groups.

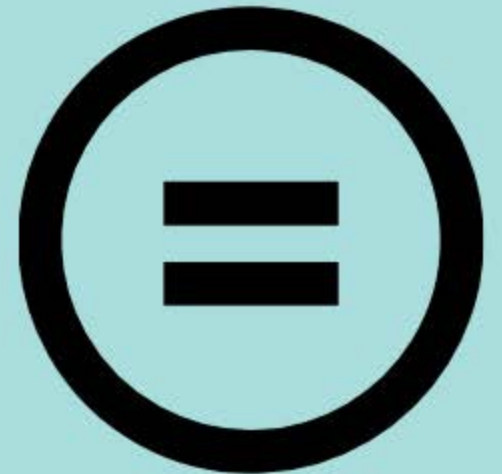


Our findings:

Most women had **normal gynaecological exams** at both 12- and 24-months postpartum, **regardless of pain.**



When **physical problems** were present, participants in both groups were **equally likely** to have them.



Biomedical characteristics were **not related to pain** during sex or pain during the exam at either time point.



Pain during sex and pain during the gynaecological exam **were related.**



Pain **during the exam** was **lower** than the pain reported **during sex.**



Most women reported that pain during the exam **did not match** the pain experienced during sex.



Greater sexual distress and **pain catastrophizing** at 12-months postpartum were **associated with pain during sex** at 12-months postpartum.



Only **greater pain catastrophizing** was associated with pain during the gynaecological exam at 12-months postpartum





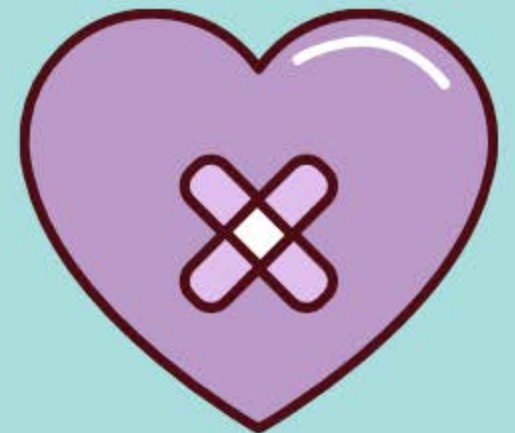
Greater **sexual distress** and greater **pain catastrophizing** at both timepoints, and greater **depressive symptoms** at 12-months were associated with greater pain during sex at 24-months postpartum.



Lower **relationship satisfaction** was associated with **greater pain** during the gynaecological exam at 24-months postpartum.

What does this mean?

Physical recovery from childbirth has little influence on the persistence of genital pain.



Psychosocial factors are related to postpartum pain.



Clinicians might offer referrals for interventions to target these psychosocial interactions.



Self-reported pain is a suitable indicator of pain; repeated gynaecological exams are not necessary.

Postpartum pain **should not be treated** as something that will go away on its own.



This is a summary of our published article:

Rossi, M.A.,* Vermeir, E.,* Brooks, M., Pierce, M., Pukall, C.F., & Rosen, N.O. (2022). Comparing self-reported pain during intercourse and pain during a standardized gynecological exam at 12- and 24-months postpartum. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 19(1), 116-131. DOI: 10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.11.004.

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