

## Unconsummated marriage

When a heterosexual couple is unable to have penetrative vaginal intercourse, their relationship may be called *unconsummated*.

The term *unconsummated marriage* is typically used in cultures where intercourse before marriage is taboo. However, in cultures where sexual relationships outside of marriage are more accepted, the term *unconsummated relationship* may be used. (Other common terms are *honeymoon impotence* or *wedding night impotence*.)

Scientists aren't sure how many couples are unable to have intercourse. Some couples do not seek help because they feel ashamed or embarrassed, and the situation may continue for several years.

Unconsummated relationships can have a great impact on relationships. Partners may feel confused, rejected, or resentful.

Both male and female sexual dysfunctions can contribute to unconsummated marriages/relationships. Here are some examples:

- Vaginismus occurs when a woman's pelvic floor muscles contract involuntarily at the start of penetration. This contraction makes the vagina tighter and narrower, making penetration (such as with a penis, finger, or gynecologist's speculum) becomes extremely difficult or impossible. [Note: Vaginismus is now classified as genito-pelvic pain/penetration disorder (GPPPD).]
- Erectile dysfunction (ED) occurs when a man is unable to get or keep an erection rigid enough for penetration. ED may have physical or psychological causes.
- *Premature ejaculation (PE)* occurs when a man ejaculates before he wishes it to happen.

Couples can have difficulties consummating their relationships for a variety of reasons:

- **Anxiety.** Couples who have little or no sexual experience may feel anxious about their first intercourse. They may not know what to expect or worry about their performance.
- **Insufficient sex education.** Partners may be unfamiliar with sexual anatomy and the sexual response cycle, especially if they have never been in sexual situations before.
- **Fear of pain.** People may expect intercourse to be painful. For some, this fear may be the result of insufficient education. Hearing stories about painful first intercourse experiences can add to apprehension, too.
- **Taboos or negative feelings about sex.** People who have grown up believing that sex is "bad" or "dirty" may have trouble consummating their relationships.

- **Societal pressure.** In some cultures, couples are expected to consummate their marriages within a certain period of time, and families might require proof that consummation has taken place. In others, couples may feel they are supposed to have sex within a certain time frame, regardless of whether they feel ready to do so.
- **A sexual secret.** People may have an undisclosed sexual orientation or preference.
- Fortunately, couples in unconsummated relationships do have treatment options. Discussing sexual issues with a healthcare provider might feel awkward, but it is an important first step.
- Some couples undergo sex therapy, where they learn more about sexuality, such as the details of their own anatomy and their partner's. They may also learn about how human bodies prepare for sex. For example, a woman who fears pain during intercourse might not be aware that the vagina lubricates for more comfortable penetration. Having this knowledge could help her feel more confident.
- During therapy, couples can also practice relaxation and communication techniques that can help them feel more comfortable with sexual situations and with each other as sexual partners.
- Issues such as erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, and vaginismus can be addressed during sex therapy as well.

## Vaginal Dilators

Vaginal dilators are tube-shaped devices designed to stretch the vagina. Often made of plastic, latex, glass, or silicone, dilators come in various sizes. A small dilator might be smaller than the size of a tampon. A large one might be the size of an average penis.

Dilators are used for a variety of conditions. For example, radiation treatment for gynecological cancer can damage the vaginal lining and make the vagina narrower and less flexible. For some women, dilation can minimize these effects and help the vagina heal.

Women with vaginismus might also use dilators. Vaginismus is a condition in which the muscles of the vagina spasm at the start of penetration, making wanted penetration difficult or impossible. A woman with vaginismus cannot control these spasms. Dilation therapy can help women relax the vagina and grow accustomed to the feeling of penetration.

Young women with vaginal agenesis, who have been born without a fully-developed vagina, may use vaginal dilators to create a "neovagina." In other words, dilation therapy can help them create a vagina on their own.

Dilators may be obtained by prescription or purchased over the counter. A medical professional can teach women how to use them and tailor therapy to their personal situation.



ED treatment – Supportive and therapeutic

Sex Therapy – for anxious couples

Cognitive behaviour therapy – long time of unconsummated marriage

Evaluating and treating Psychogenic causes