

## Pain in the clitoris: Help moving from "ouch" to "ahhh" <sup>[1]</sup>

(1) Dear Alice,

i have been experiencing pain in my clitoris and generally in this area. It's a sharp pain that happens with the lightest touch, crossing my legs, or from wearing tight pants. I've never had this before and i'm wondering what it is. Also i've noticed the hood of the clitoris when pulled back, you can see like an inner layer of skin. Please i'm very worried, can you tell me what these may be? thanx

(2)

Dear Alice,

Is there anything that can be done for clitoral pain? I have a painful clitoris that swells, itches, and hurts throughout the month. I have had pain with this for years now and no doctor can find anything wrong with it. The only physical evidence is tiny white specks of discharge way back under the "hood." But if I pull back to look to see if there is anything wrong, it hurts immensely for days afterward. It interferes with my sex life with my husband because of the fear of pain if he touches the area. PLEASE let me know if there is a condition that this is related to or if there is any kind of cream that can minimize the pain. I have tried several kinds of Vagisil type treatments, but they do not help. Thank you.

(3)

Dear Alice,

I have been having twinges of pain in my clitoris and just got over a UTI. Meds for 10 days. I think it's from my jeans being too tight there, but sometimes it pains for no reason, even laying down. Just started in the last 2 weeks, seems to be fine when wearing sweats or more comfortable clothing. I have never heard of pain in the clitoris before and can't find anything on it.

### **Answer**

Dear Readers,

A happy, healthy "joy button" or clitoris is a delight to press, caress, nibble, or rub, but one that is irritated and sore can send electric jolts of pain through the body at the slightest touch. A brief

anatomy lesson can help to explain how and why this can happen. The clitoris is made up of three main parts:

*The Glans (a.k.a. the tip or head of the clitoris)* This little ball of erectile tissue is located directly above the opening of the urethra and directly below the pubic bone. Depending on an individual woman's anatomy and her state of sexual arousal, the glans may or may not be visible. When women become sexually aroused, the erectile tissue in the glans becomes engorged (swollen), much like the penis, and increases in size and sensitivity.

#### *The Shaft*

The clitoris narrows directly behind the glans and continues back into the body, where it meets with the nerve bundle that transmits the incredible signals that the glans receives.

#### *The Hood*

Both the glans and shaft of the clitoris are covered with this fold of skin that is actually the upper part of the labia. The hood seems to protect the clitoris from too much direct stimulation. When a woman is not sexually aroused, or when a woman is in *high* arousal, the glans retreats under the hood and is out of sight.

The hood of the clitoris contains glands that produce a lubricating fluid called sebum, which allows the hood to move smoothly back and forth over the glans and the shaft of the clitoris. When sebum accumulates, it turns into a white, cheese-like substance called smegma. Smegma, in turn, if it is not washed away with frequent bathing, can harden and rub between the hood and the shaft similar to a grain of sand under an eyelid — the result is an irritated clitoris that can produce incredible pain at the merest movement. Tight jeans or pressure from sexual stimulation can be excruciating. Accumulations of smegma can also cause the skin of the hood to adhere (stick) to the shaft and glans (similar to what can happen with a man who has foreskin). These clitoral adhesions can cause pain and irritation as well.

Usually, frequent bathing and good hygiene can prevent or resolve this problem, but some women may have narrow openings to their clitoral hood that make it harder to wash away built-up secretions. If you have recurrent episodes of clitoral pain, you may want to try soaking in a steamy tub and gently moving the skin around the clitoris back and away from the glans — don't tug or forcibly retract the hood since this can cause further pain and irritation. These gentle "stretches" can, over time, widen the opening of the hood, allowing more freedom of movement for both pleasure and washing.

For a few women, "do-it-yourself" measures are not enough. Gynecologists might remove adhesions and/or stretch the opening of the clitoral hood after using a local anesthetic to first numb the genital region. If diligent bathing and gentle hood massage do not relieve the pain, talk with your gynecologist about the possibilities of a "stretching" procedure, among other options. Remember, minutes spent maintaining good clitoral health can pay you back with hours of indescribable pleasure.

Alice!

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Published date:

Sep 20, 2002

Last reviewed on:

Apr 28, 2015

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