

# Coping with Anxiety About Having Sex

## Objective

To identify why you have sexual anxiety and determine ways to cope.

## What to Know

Sexual anxiety is a common problem for both men and women while dating, in established or casual relationships, or in any other sexual situation. Sexual anxiety can be an occasional or chronic issue, and it can lead to avoiding sexual activities, talking about sex, or engaging in anything related to sex. It can be caused by many different issues. Check off any of the following problems you experience.

\_\_\_ **Body image problems.** Common for both men and women, it refers to feeling insecure or ashamed about their bodies. Men may feel insecure about their penis size, and women often worry about physical aspects like body weight or the size of their breasts.

\_\_\_ **Sexual dysfunction.** Body image issues, anxiety, or physical problems can contribute to erectile dysfunction, problems having an orgasm, low libido, painful sex, and more.

\_\_\_ **Shame and guilt about having sex.** This may be related to cultural, religious, family of origin, or other issues.

\_\_\_ **Relationship problems.** When couples experience conflict, arguments, stress, or other issues, this can lead to anxiety and an inability to experience sexual pleasure.

\_\_\_ **Sexual trauma.** A history of sexual abuse can create sexual anxiety. Even when someone is with a partner they love and trust, sexual activity can trigger past emotions.

\_\_\_ **Infidelity.** If a partner cheats, the other partner may worry they cannot trust them, or they will contract a sexually transmitted infection. Discovering infidelity can lead to resentment, anger, insecurity, or sadness, all of which can interfere with sex.

\_\_\_ **Pressure to have sex.** Sexual pressure, spoken or unspoken, diminishes sexual pleasure. Sex should always be consensual, and if a person feels pressured to have sex or to engage in sexual activities, they may feel anxious, angry, or resentful.

\_\_\_ **Lack of sexual experience.** If someone has little or no sexual experience, they may have "performance anxiety." Rather than being focused on pleasure, they engage in "spectatoring," which refers to being very self-conscious and stuck in their head.

\_\_\_ **Stress and worry.** Too much stress takes people outside the sexual experience. Even if unrelated to sex, it can be difficult to relax enough to enjoy sex.

\_\_\_ **Mental health issues.** Depression, addiction, and other mental health problems can lead to sexual anxiety.

If you experience sexual anxiety, you are not alone, but without help, sexual anxiety can worsen over time. You deserve to have a fulfilling sex life, so if you experience sexual anxiety, try the following activity.

## What to Do

Answer the following questions and try some of the following exercises.

***If you have experienced sexual trauma:*** Feeling safe and in control is essential. Past traumas can lead to triggers, so notice if these experiences carry over into the intimacy you share with your partner. If this applies to you, what are your triggers? Try to be as honest as possible.

---

---

---

Make a mental or even physical note of moments when you notice a mental shift to anxiety about sexual activity—even if it happens earlier in the day or because of something that had nothing to do with sex. If your sexual anxiety is related to something your partner says or does, take note of that as well.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Are you comfortable bringing this up to your partner in a non-accusatory manner? Why or why not?

---

---

---

*Please note: You may need to take a break from sexual activity while you work through any triggers.*

After identifying your triggers, explore why these triggers exist and when they started. Be specific.

---

---

---

---

---

---

Are you comfortable being open and honest with your partner? Why or why not?

---

---

---

Next, you will begin to experiment with activities to reduce your sexual anxiety. Just before engaging in sexual activity, try one or more of the following activities:

- deep breathing and meditation
- focus on what feels good through self-touch and masturbation
- focus on non-sexual touch with your partner
- prioritize connection with your partner
- explore erogenous zones with your partner
- focus on the experience instead of orgasm or performance
- give your partner a sensual massage or take a warm bath together
- distract yourself with romantic music or a sexy movie

In the following chart, record your progress over the next month. Note the date, if you experienced sexual anxiety, and what you did to cope. Then, write about the outcome.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Anxiety Y / N</b>	<b>What did you do to cope?</b>	<b>Outcome</b>

Date	Anxiety Y / N	What did you do to cope?	Outcome

### Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

---

---

---

If you struggle with sexual anxiety, how motivated are you to address this problem?

---

---

---

Is this an exercise you will continue to use? Why or why not?

---

---

---

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

---

---

---