

Sex Therapy: What You Should Know

- [How it works](#)
- [How to know if you need it](#)
- [Finding a provider](#)
- [Considerations](#)
- [Bottom line](#)

What is sex therapy?

Sex therapy is a type of talk therapy that's designed to help individuals and couples address medical, psychological, personal, or interpersonal factors impacting sexual satisfaction.

The goal of sex therapy is to help people move past physical and emotional challenges to have a satisfying relationship and pleasurable sex life.

[Sexual dysfunction](#) is common. In fact, [43 percent of women and 31 percent of men](#) report experiencing some type of sexual dysfunction during their lifetimes. These dysfunctions may include:

- [erectile dysfunction](#)
- low libido
- [lack of interest](#)
- [premature ejaculation](#)

- low confidence
- lack of response to sexual stimulus
- inability to reach orgasm
- excessive libido
- inability to control sexual behavior
- distressing sexual thoughts
- unwanted sexual fetishes

A fulfilling sex life is healthy and natural. Physical and emotional intimacy are essential parts of your well-being. When sexual dysfunction occurs, having that fulfilling sex life can be difficult.

Sex therapy may be able to help you reframe your sexual challenges and increase your sexual satisfaction.

How does sex therapy work?

Sex therapy is like any type of psychotherapy. You treat the condition by talking through your experiences, worries, and feelings.

Together with your therapist, you then work out coping mechanisms to help improve your responses in the future so that you can have a healthier sex life.

During your initial appointments, your therapist will either talk with just you or with you and your partner together. The therapist is there to guide and help you process your current challenge:

- They are not there to take one person's side or to help persuade anyone.

- Also, everyone will keep their clothes on. The sex therapist will not be having sexual relations with anyone or showing anyone how to have sex.

With each session, your therapist will continue to push you toward better management and acceptance of your concerns that may be leading to sexual dysfunction. All talk therapy, including sex therapy, is both a supportive and an educational environment.

It's meant to provide comfort and encouragement for change. You will likely leave your therapist's office with assignments and work to do before your next appointment.

If your therapist suspects the dysfunction you're experiencing is the result of a physical sexual concern, they may refer you to a medical doctor.

Your therapist and the doctor can consult about your signs and symptoms and work to help find any physical concerns that may be contributing to greater sexual problems.

Do I need sex therapy?

One way to determine if you need to see a sex therapist instead of another type of talk therapist is to analyze what parts of your life are the most affected by how you feel right now.

If your quality of life and emotional health are greatly affected by your sexual dysfunction, it's a good idea to see a sex therapist. Likewise, if a lack of intimacy or difficulty communicating with a partner leads as your most serious personal concern, a sex therapist is the place to start.

HEALTHLINE NEWSLETTER

Get our twice weekly Women's Wellness email

To help you be well, we'll send you honest talk about women's bodies, and beauty, nutrition, and fitness advice.

Enter your email

SIGN UP NOW

Your [privacy](#) is important to us. Any information you provide to us via this website may be placed by us on servers located in countries outside of the EU. If you do not agree to such placement, do not provide the information.

How do I find a sex therapist?

A certified sex therapist can be a licensed psychiatrist, psychologist, marriage and family therapist, or clinical social worker. These mental health experts undergo extensive additional training in human sexuality in order to be accredited as a certified sex therapist.

Start your search with the [American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists](#) (AASECT). This organization is responsible for overseeing clinical training for sexual health practitioners. They also manage credentials for these health care providers.

If someone is licensed and certified, you'll be able to find them through AASECT.

You can also do a Google or [Psychology Today](#) search for therapists in your area or call your local hospital or community education office. Many of these organizations will happily provide information on sex therapists in their hospital network.

You can also ask your insurance company. They may be able to give you a list of names of certified sex therapists. You can work through the list until you find the sex therapist you want.

If you'd like a more personal recommendation, talk with your health care provider, gynecologist, or urologist. Many doctors have met and recommend sex therapists to their patients every day. They might be able to direct you toward a provider whose style closely aligns with your own.

You can also talk to your friends. Bringing up intimate details can be difficult for some people, but if you're comfortable asking a friend, they may be able to recommend a doctor you and your partner can trust.

What to know before your appointment

When you're ready to begin sex therapy, keep these five things in mind as you prepare to decide on whom to meet for therapy.

Compatibility

Therapists are unique. Successful therapy depends largely on how well you communicate with your therapist and how much you trust them and their guidance to help you through your concerns.

If you don't feel comfortable with a sex therapist at any point, look for another.

Solo versus couple

You do not have to bring your partner with you to sex therapy. For some individuals, solo sex therapy is adequate to address concerns. For others, having both people present during therapy may help improve satisfaction and build a stronger connection.

Talk with your partner about your choice to begin therapy. If you'd like them to be involved, ask.

Logistics

When deciding on a sex therapist, it's important to keep in mind where your therapist's office is and how easy it is for you to get to. You may be attending appointments during your lunch hour, after work, or on random days when you have a free hour.

Some therapists also offer telehealth sessions, so you may be able to meet with them online from the comfort of your home.

Make sure it's convenient to reach your doctor's office, or you may find yourself creating excuses to avoid it.

Treatment plan

During your first appointment, your therapist will likely go over an initial treatment plan with you. For most individuals and couples, several sessions are required at first.

However, once treatment is making a significant difference and your therapist feels confident you can handle future challenges, you may be released from your therapist's care.

The bottom line

A fulfilling sex life is vital to your health for many reasons. Physical and emotional elements of a healthy sex life have far-reaching [benefits](#), including lower blood pressure, better heart health, and stress reduction. Sex is also just a natural, fun part of life.

However, for some people, sex is a source of great anxiety and worry. Sexual dysfunction can lead to relationship complications, loss of confidence, and many other negative effects.

Sex therapy is an integrative approach to treating and eliminating underlying challenges. These concerns may be physical, such as low circulation. They may also be psychological concerns, such as anxiety, stress, and confidence issues.

Sex therapy can help individuals and couples find a way to have open, honest communication so that they can work through any concerns or challenges toward a healthy, happy sex life.

Last medically reviewed on June 26, 2018

8 sources expanded

Healthline has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical associations. We avoid using tertiary references. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our [editorial policy](#).

- Allahdadi KJ, et al. (2009). Female sexual dysfunction: Therapeutic options and experimental challenges.
[ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3008577/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3008577/)
- Binik YM, et al. (2009). The future of sex therapy: Specialization or marginalization?
[ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19495953](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19495953)

- Brody S. (2010). The relative health benefits of different sexual activities.
[ism.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095\(15\)32977-5/fulltext](http://ism.jsexmed.org/article/S1743-6095(15)32977-5/fulltext)
- Brotto LA, et al. (2016). Mindfulness-based sex therapy improves genital-subjective arousal concordance in women with sexual desire/arousal difficulties.
link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10508-015-0689-8
- Everaerd W, et al. (1981). A comparison of sex and communication therapy: Couples complaining of orgasmic dysfunction.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00926238108405429>
- Hawton K. (1995). Treatment of sexual dysfunctions by sex therapy and other approaches.
ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/7496638
- .
[Sexual dysfunction](#)
- Simons JS, et al. (2001). Prevalence of sexual dysfunctions: Results from a decade of research.
ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2426773/

<https://www.healthline.com/health/sex-therapy>

Medically reviewed by Janet Brito, Ph.D., LCSW, CST — Written by Kimberly Holland — Updated on June 26, 2018

Janet Brito, Ph.D., LCSW, CST

Janet Brito is an AASECT-certified sex therapist who also has a license in clinical psychology and social work. She completed her postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Minnesota, one of only a few programs in the world dedicated to sexuality training. Currently, she's based in Honolulu, Hawaii, and is the founder of the Center for Sexual and Reproductive Health. Dr. Brito has been featured on many outlets, including O: The Oprah

Magazine, HuffPost, Playboy, Women's Health, Thrive Global, and Midweek Publications