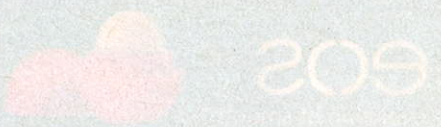


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When sex hurts,
no one is happy.

“I Botoxed My Vagina”

For years, she couldn't wear jeans or have intercourse without being in agony. Finally, at 28, a last-ditch trip to a plastic surgeon changed everything....

AS TOLD TO KORIN MILLER

Until recently, I couldn't wear pants without feeling an intense burning sensation in my vagina. It wasn't just clothes that threw me off: Sex was often so painful, I'd have to stop before things even got started. My vagina was cramping my style.

It all began with a yeast infection my freshman year of college. The stinging feeling wouldn't go away no matter how many OTC creams I tried. I went to my primary-care doctor, who prescribed something stronger. But over the next few months, nothing worked, and I was still in pain that was getting worse. At a loss, she passed me off to a sexual-health clinic, where I had repeat tests for STDs, all of which were negative. Next, they sent me to an ob-gyn. It had been more than a year since I'd first noticed the symptoms.

A Name for the Pain

Luckily, the specialist knew what was wrong. She diagnosed me with vulvodynia, a condition Carrie once called vulva-*what-ia?* in an episode of *Sex and the City*. The doctor explained that the yeast infection had caused the nerves in my vulva to fire constantly, which is why I felt the burning sensation. But they also made the muscles down there clench like a fist, making me feel uncomfortable 24/7.

There's no cure for vulvodynia, but there are some things doctors think can relieve it. I went to physical therapy once a week, where the therapist would stick her thumb up my crotch to massage me internally. And I started taking low-dose antidepressants...for my *vagina*. My doctor thought it could help reset my nerves down there. But after months of slurring my words at my job as an investment banker, I took myself off the medication.

I also had to use dilators to try to widen the opening to my vagina and to relax it. They looked exactly like

vibrators, and I was supposed to insert them for a few hours before bed and to get warmed up before sex. Despite all these efforts, vulvodynia was still screwing with my life. I work long hours, and sitting at my desk would put me in so much pain I'd get up to "use the bathroom" every 20 minutes or so—sometimes wanting to cry as I stood up in the stall.

At this point, four years after I felt the first symptom, I'd met a great guy and married him. He didn't understand what was going on down there at first but eventually got it after I walked him through the dilators and smearing numbing cream on myself before we could get busy. Occasionally, things wouldn't be as bad as usual down there and sex would just feel slightly painful at the beginning. But often, it hurt so much that we would have to avoid intercourse. I'd become upset sometimes that I couldn't have sex with my husband, but I felt lucky that he was so understanding.

One Crazy Solution

I'd convinced myself that I was okay with the way things were when I got an e-mail from a friend that said "You *have* to read this!" It was a blog post that made fun of women who Botoxed their lady bits. I laughed, thinking it was the latest *Real Housewives*-esque plastic surgery until I looked a little closer. Basically, Peter Pacik, a plastic surgeon in New Hampshire, was conducting an FDA-approved trial that used Botox to "freeze" vaginal muscles and relieve the pain felt by women like me.

I worried that the process was still experimental. But after doing a little more research, I decided to go for it and contacted Dr. Pacik's office. Once he determined that I was a good

candidate, we set a date for the procedure, and I crossed my fingers.

On the car ride from New York to Dr. Pacik's office in New Hampshire, I silently freaked while my husband drove. What if I died under anesthesia and everyone knew it was because I tried to Botox my vagina?

When we arrived at the office, I got changed and poked by the anesthesiologist. When I saw my husband again, I was in a hospital bed with my legs spread and strapped into stirrups with everything on display. It was beyond humiliating. The next thing I knew, I groggily woke up in the hospital bed with a big dilator inside me.

Later that day, I was feeling better and went out to lunch with my husband—with the dilator still inside me.

“I'd get up to 'use the bathroom' every 20 minutes—wanting to cry as I stood in the stall.”

It was kept in place by a special pair of tight underwear, and I couldn't help but feel a little sorry for myself.

It took about eight days for the Botox to kick in. Before then, I had to put in dilators for two hours a day. And eventually, I just felt...better.

Wearing pants is still a little uncomfortable, but I now enjoy a pain-free sex life. The Botox will wear off in four months, and before then, my muscles are supposed to learn how to be relaxed. But even if it all goes according to plan, I'm considering doing a second round to see if I can wear jeans with zero discomfort. In the meantime, I'm just grateful that my days of suffering in silence are finally over. ■