

■ Vaginismus (painful intercourse)

This is a condition where intercourse is actually painful and the women finds herself squeezing her pelvic muscles, or the muscles around the vagina, into spasm.

- ◆ Sensate focus concentrating on non-genital and genital areas is a good place to start, but remember full sexual intercourse is not the purpose of the exercise. Look at your own genitalia in a hand mirror and try to locate the sensitive parts by touching.
- ◆ Start experimenting by first putting the top of your little finger inside your own vagina and, as you get used to this, your whole finger and then two fingers. When you can accommodate two of your own fingers comfortably, allow your partner to insert a finger into your vagina slowly and gently until you are used to it.
- ◆ An alternative is to insert a small dilator into your vagina. These dilators are available in varying sizes and so it is a good idea to work up gradually to large dilators and to keeping them in for longer periods of time. As you feel more comfortable, the spasms will lessen and you can move on to a slightly larger size. Use the dilation procedure, then remove it and insert your partner's penis at your own pace.
- ◆ Graded vaginal dilators can be obtained from John Bell and Croydon, Wigmore Street, London W1.

■ Orgasmic dysfunction

- ◆ This is often initially a question of overcoming cultural brainwashing which conditions women to be the passive partner. Ignore all the nonsense which says that women do not initiate sex or get pleasure. Learn to move more vigorously during intercourse to stimulate yourself and teach your partner to move in ways which satisfy you.
- ◆ Try out both non-genital sensate focus and genital sensate focus, encouraging your partner to do what is pleasing to you. Remember that in both cases full sexual intercourse is banned; the exercise is about bringing your partner pleasure and being relaxed.
- ◆ Masturbation training programme. Look at your vagina in a small hand mirror. Stimulate yourself. Try making circular or up-and-down movements of your finger on your clitoris. Vary the speed of movement and pressure. If you are not moist enough try saliva or a baby lotion on your fingertips. Now try to imagine a sexual fantasy that you like while continuing to stimulate yourself. If you do not climax you can obtain a hand-held vibrator. Acquire books or a magazine which contain suitable sexual fantasies (Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden*, Quartet, London, 1973 is highly recommended). Allow yourself the option of creating your fantasy.