

# REGAINING POWER

Sexual Abuse Survivors Find Unlimited Freedom Through Sex Toys

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EALING FROM sexual trauma is a multifaceted process, and every person's journey is different. Counseling, talk therapy, hypnosis and EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques like "tapping") are some successful techniques that can heal emotional pain, help replace negative thought patterns with positive ones, and aid in

practicing forgiveness for both yourself and the perpetrator. Historically though, the lingering *physical* effects of assault have been overlooked, presuming that the body heals itself completely after abuse, unlike the mind that bears the long-term scars. But it turns out that our bodies are affected long-term too. We hold trauma through tension in our very cells and muscles. In fact, there is a direct correlation between pelvic pain and sexual trauma, so it's very important to explore physical healing techniques along with mental and emotional therapies. Sex

toys play a vital role in this type of healing, helping women and men connect with themselves again.

On the medical side, there are physical therapists that focus specifically on pelvic floor healing, which overlaps with sexual healing in many ways. The chronic muscle tension caused by sexual trauma can result in painful intercourse, painful or premature ejaculation in men, and can even affect how you sit and how you empty your bladder and bowels. Manual therapies like massage and stretching help with flexibility and blood flow, biofeedback techniques show how the pelvic muscles are working (which helps individuals learn about their own body's reactions), and sometimes even employing mild electrical stimulation is used to help to engage specific muscle groups. Tools like vaginal dilators are often recommended to help women get in touch with their sexual organs, learning how to relax their pelvic muscles.

There is also a healing practice called "de-armoring" which uses



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Tantric massage to release stored tension in the body. It has effective applications for sexual trauma victims who experience numbness or pain in the pelvic region. Vaginal and anal de-armoring uses targeted pressure inside the vagina and anus to soften the muscles, releasing tension and pain. Women and men who have used this technique describe the results as a sort of reclaiming of their genitals, where they discover a new depth of sensitivity previously shut off to them. This technique enhances sensuality for anyone, but for victims of sexual trauma it's particularly essential to reclaim your sexual identity.

People who have been through trauma often experience a void of sexual pleasure. It's not uncommon to disassociate from your own body as a survival technique, which leaves you feeling numb to any form of sexual stimulation. That's why many victims speak as though their body has been "taken" from them. One of the main goals of sexual healing is to take your body back! But becoming sexually active again can trigger flashbacks to trauma; so starting slow with self-pleasure is my suggestion.

Since sexual abuse is fundamentally about loss of control (abusers exert their control at the expense of their victim's), sex toys are so important because they help regain that sense of personal power. They literally put control of your sexual pleasure back in your hands. When you use a toy, you are the only one who has a say in how it's used. You can direct your own play and take your time, allowing yourself to feel pleasure on your own terms. As life-like as sex toys purport to be, they aren't the "real thing," which is a good thing for people healing from sexual abuse because it makes it much easier to separate your sensual pleasure from any triggers. Build an affirmative relationship with your body again, and get back in the driver's seat of your own sexual satisfaction.

There are some toys that can be used specifically for healing, like the non-phallic **2 WOMANIZER**, which works by clitoral suction, or **1 LE WAND**, which is a non-penetrative cli-

toral stimulator. I've also been learning about toys that employ biofeedback for people who "freeze up" when they're touched. Upon feeling the muscle response, the toy will begin to vibrate, or enter some other mode to let the user know that a body response has been detected. I look forward to exploring more about this technology and how it can help people heal.

**3 BEN WA BALLS** are also a great way to explore your own body. "Fifty Shades of Grey" brought them into the mainstream with the message that they can heighten sexual experience, and of course they've been touted for their ability to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, but they have healing properties too. I have found with my clients healing from sexual trauma that Ben Wa balls can help develop a sense of body "ownership" for women. By placing them into your vagina, you literally claim that space in your body for yourself. Whether it's a symbolic or physical benefit, or both, it works. I recommend balls with a retrieval loop (to reduce anxiety about losing them!) like Evolved's Vibratissimo, which also comes in a single ball version, which is a useful option.

According to the Center for Disease Control & Prevention, nearly one in five women and one in 59 men in the U.S. have been raped at some time in their lives, which means there are a lot of individuals who need access to the proper healing tools and therapies. The stepping stones to sexual healing are different for everyone, and there are myriad ways to turn on your desire button again, but in my experience, there's an unlimited freedom with sex toys that allows you to make love to yourself in the way you want, in order to heal. ■



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