My knickers felt like NEEDLES

Kate had an agonising pain — and it was in the most embarrassing of places

Squirming in my seat, I tried to find a comfortable position. The most sensitive part of me — the entrance to my vagina — was sore and swollen, making my knickers feel like they were knitted from needles.

For the past week or so, I'd assumed I had thrush, so I'd smeared on antifungal cream. But what had begun as itching was now burning, and wearing jeans, trousers or tights was too painful.

The GP's I saw were baffled. I was treated for thrush, cystitis, bacterial infection. Nothing helped. I was desperate — but determined to be a normal 24-year-old. I kept cycling and having sex with my partner Tom. But it was hard — walking was painful and having a pee felt like being splashed with acid.

After four months, the anguish took me to A&E. There, I learnt it could've been sexually transmitted. That caused terrible rows with Tom, as I accused him of cheating. We'd been together for six months and he swore he hadn't strayed.

Still, a couple of months on, at a drop-in clinic for genito-urinary medicine, a doctor suggested herpes. I asked for a second opinion.

The next doctor did a simple test. She touched my vagina's entrance with a cotton bud and I shrieked with pain. 'You have vestibulodynia,' she said — not an STD but a chronic pain syndrome around the vulva. 'It may be connected to a prior pain or injury,' the doctor said.

She prescribed anaesthetic cream and low-dose antidepressants to reduce pain messages to the brain — and gave me info on the Vulval Pain Society.

Through them, I found an acupuncturist specialising in vulval health. He told me my pain would go — eventually. Over months he used acupuncture, gave me calming herbs and a pH-balanced feminine wash.

I also saw a chiropractor. One theory is that nerve damage can trigger vulval pain. My pelvis was slightly misaligned after a skiing fall a few years before.

To help me relax, I took up yoga and meditation. I soon had enough confidence to stop using the antidepressants and cream. After three months, I felt back in control.

A year on, my pain's nearly gone — cycling doesn't hurt and, best of all, sex with Tom is fun again. It's amazing our relationship survived.

For more info, see the Vulval Pain Society's website at: vulvalpainsociety.org. Or call the Vulval Health Awareness Campaign on 07765 947 599.