

Revealing Khatna To My Doctor

"I don't remember too much from my khatna (cutting). I was maybe five or six years old. I remember being in physical pain, but after I healed and the pain went away, I stopped thinking about it. As I grew older, I started becoming more curious about how my khatna affected me. I was in college when I decided to have my first appointment with a gynecologist. I was in a relationship and having intimacy challenges with my partner. I wondered if being cut had something to do with it. Was it was affecting me mentally? I decided to tell my gynecologist because I wanted to understand the mental and physical effects of my khatna.

"I sat down on the exam table and waited for my gynecologist. When she arrived, she asked me about my medical history. I told her I was experiencing low sex drive and wanted to make sure everything was working 'down there.' She smiled and, since it was my first visit, she decided to do a pap smear. She examined my vagina and did my pap smear. 'Everything looks good to me,' she explained. I took a deep breath and told her about my khatna. 'When I was little, something near my vagina was cut. I'm curious to know what exactly happened to me,' I said. She looked surprised, seemingly unaware of khatna. I was disheartened to hear that my doctor hadn't heard about it. I found myself wondering, 'will she be able to provide the care I need? When the doctor re-examined me, she noticed a scar on my clitoris. 'There is a small scar, but otherwise physically you look fine,' she told me.

"The doctor must have noticed my puzzled look. She asked if I wanted to talk about what had happened to me. I told her that in my community, girls go through an experience called khatna. I told her how I was five or six years old when my aunt took me to an apartment building where a lady lifted up my dress and I felt a sharp pain. I told her about the pain I felt when peeing. The doctor listened intently, expressing regret that she had never heard of the practice. She promised to read up on khatna and asked me to schedule a follow-up visit.

"During my next visit, I was pleased to see that the doctor had done her homework, reading about khatna as she had told me she would. She explained that I had undergone type 1 female genital mutilation, meaning that only a small part of my clitoris had been removed. Low sex drive was one possible symptom of my condition, she informed me. She gave me the names of clinics I could go to for counselling. 'My door is always open too,' she said. I was grateful that I found a doctor that took the time to listen, understand, and support me."