

Masturbation

Masturbation means touching and rubbing your penis or clitoris and breasts for sexual pleasure. It's a normal and healthy way for people to explore their own bodies. It's also a form of safer sex that lets people find out what feels good, where and how they like to be touched and how to have an orgasm.

Masturbation can also happen between two people (mutual masturbation). This can be a very intimate experience, especially for people who don't feel ready for sex.

Even though it's normal, some people who masturbate feel ashamed or embarrassed about it. This is partly because masturbation has been wrongly labelled as deviant, dangerous and sinful over the years and many of these out-dated myths still exist.

In young people, it's also because many feel nervous or unsure about their developing bodies and sexual feelings. Mixed messages and misinformation about masturbation from parents, friends and the media can make them more anxious.

Some people think only people without partners masturbate, but most people with regular partners continue to masturbate throughout their adult life. The idea that adults who masturbate must be sexually deprived or inadequate simply isn't true.

Other terms for masturbation include self-pleasuring and wanking.

Myths about masturbation

Masturbation has been wrongly blamed for a range of health problems, including:

- Blindness
- Mental health issues
- Sexual perversion
- Reduced sexual function.

How much is too much?

A common concern, especially among young people, is the frequency of masturbation. 'Normal' ranges from several times per day, week or month to never masturbating at all. How often a person masturbates isn't a problem, unless it's linked to an obsessive compulsive disorder where the same activity must be repeated over and over.

Sexual health benefits

Some of the known sexual health benefits of masturbation include the following:

- It's a safer form of sex that carries no risk of sexually transmissible infection or unplanned pregnancy.
- It releases sexual tension and lets people explore their sexuality by themselves. It might suit those who don't have a partner, aren't having sex with their partner or are abstaining from sex.
- Being familiar with your own sexual responses helps you communicate your wants and needs to your partner.
- Masturbation is a common treatment for sexual dysfunction. For example, women who don't orgasm can learn by masturbating and men who experience premature ejaculation can use masturbation to learn control.

General health benefits

Some of the general health benefits of masturbation might include the following:

- Relaxes your muscles
- Helps you fall asleep
- Promotes the release of the brain's opioid-like neurotransmitters (endorphins), which cause feelings of physical and mental wellbeing
- Reduces stress
- Enhances self-esteem.

Masturbation in babies and young children

Infants tend to masturbate as part of general body exploration. Boys generally start masturbating at an earlier age than girls, since the clitoris and vagina are harder to find than the penis. Sexual fantasies don't usually accompany masturbation in childhood.

Young children begin to pick up on their parents' attitudes towards masturbation. If parents react negatively, the child can feel ashamed of their sexual feelings and behaviours. Studies show that their reaction also impacts on their child's sexual attitudes and behaviours in adulthood. Tips for parents include:

- Remember that children masturbate for many different reasons, including curiosity, exploration and sensory pleasure.
- Reassure yourself that masturbation in children is normal.
- Focus on the setting, rather than the activity itself. For example, if your child is masturbating in public, tell them that what they're doing is fine if they do it in private (like toileting).
- Children might turn to masturbation in times of stress. If your child's masturbation is affecting playtime and other activities, find out what is making them anxious or upset.

If you're concerned about your child's behaviour, talk with your doctor or paediatrician.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Paediatrician
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100 or the Action Centre for people aged under 25, Tel. (03) 9660 4700

Things to remember

- Masturbation is a safer form of sex that carries no risk of sexually transmissible infection or unplanned pregnancy.
- Being familiar with your own sexual responses helps you communicate your wants and needs to your partner.
- The way parents react to their child's masturbation impacts on the child's sexual attitudes and behaviours in adulthood.

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Family Planning Victoria

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