
Men and sexuality

Summary

- Young boys have a sense of gender from around 2 years old.
 - Puberty hits at around 12. Boys will go through significant physical and psychological changes as they change from a boy into a man.
 - Always practise safe sex.
 - For some boys (and men), gender isn't straightforward. If this is you, help is available if you need it.
 - Sexual assault can happen to anyone. Unwanted sexual activity is not ok.
 - Sometimes things in the bedroom may not go smoothly. Talk to your doctor about any problems you may be experiencing.
 - You are never too old to have sex.
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Your sexuality is a key part of who you are. Throughout your life, it will influence your choices and your experiences.

Looking after your sexual health is important. Be sure to practise safe sex, and remember, if you have any sexual health issues there is always someone you can talk to.

Sexuality for boys and young men

Boys begin to develop a sense of gender identity from around 2 years of age, when they begin to understand the differences between boys and girls. Gender roles become important for children aged 6–10 years. Kids in the early school years often divide themselves in the school yard – all the boys on one side and all the girls on the other!

And then at around age 12, **puberty** starts for most boys. Puberty is the time when your sexual and reproductive organs mature. Boys go through significant physical changes, including:

- height and muscle growth
- genital growth
- hair growth
- voice changes
- wet dreams
- erections
- breast changes.

There are also many emotional changes including:

- coping with your changing body
- frustration because you feel different
- mood swings
- energy changes.

Men and masturbation

Masturbation is touching and rubbing parts of your body for sexual pleasure. You might touch or rub your penis until you ejaculate or 'come', for example. It is normal to masturbate. You will probably become interested in this at some time in your childhood. It feels good and may help you cope with stress and relax.

There is no 'normal' amount of masturbation. 'Normal' can range from several times a day, week or month to not masturbating at all. How often you masturbate is not a problem, unless it is affecting your ability to live your everyday life.

Having sex for the first time

Having sex for the first time is a big deal. You have probably thought about it a lot. It can be fun. It might feel good. Or the first time may also be a bit of a letdown. But remember:

- Both partners need to agree to have sex.
- No-one has the right to force you to have sex.
- You always have the right to say no, and so does your partner.
- It is okay to change your mind, even if you have already started.

Your sexual partner

Most men are sexually attracted to women. But some men are attracted to men. Or to both women and men. And other men are not attracted to anyone. There are many forms of **sexuality** – straight, **gay**, **bisexual** or asexual, just to name a few. And some men explore different types of sexuality, particularly when they are young.

If you are an adult and you are with a consenting adult, you are probably safe to explore your sexuality. Visit **Lawstuff** for more information about age, consent and the law.

Transsexuality

If you are transsexual, you have body sex characteristics that do not match your gender identity (that is, your inner sense of being male, female or somewhere in between). You have gender dysphoria if this mismatch causes you severe distress. Better Health Channel has more information about **transsexuality** and where you can go if you need help.

Practise safe sex

Don't make excuses. Protect yourself and your partner from a **sexually transmissible infection** or an unplanned pregnancy. Use a condom. They don't cost much and you can get them at chemists and supermarkets.

If you are in a committed, monogamous relationship, and neither you nor your partner has a sexually transmissible disease, you could think about other types of **contraception**, if necessary.

Safe sex doesn't just mean contraception. It also means having sex that is enjoyable and respectful. This means:

- having sex with the right person
- having sex when you are both ready
- having the kind of sex you both want and enjoy
- having sex at a time and place you are both happy with
- feeling good about the type of sex you are having.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes the victim feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is sexual activity that the victim has not given consent to, and refers to a broad range of sexual behaviours, including the use or threat of violence to force another person to engage in sexual activity against their will.

Sexual assault includes rape, child **sexual abuse** and indecent assault. These crimes are about power and control, not desire and pleasure. They affect the victim in many different ways, including:

- shock and denial
- shame and embarrassment
- fear
- silence
- anxiety
- depression
- guilt and blame
- low self-esteem
- isolation

- nightmares and flashbacks
- withdrawal
- mood swings
- loss of confidence
- loss of trust.

Men and women can both be victims of sexual assault. If you have been the victim of sexual assault, there are people that can help you. **If you need immediate help, call 000.** If you want to talk, see your doctor, or contact one of the services listed under 'Where to Get Help'.

Men and sexual health

Just like any other aspect of your health, sometimes, things can go wrong with your sexual health. Some of the common sexual health issues affecting men are discussed below.

Premature ejaculation

Premature ejaculation is the most common sexual problem for men. It means you ejaculate sooner than you or your partner want, causing distress for one or both of you. It is a problem only if it happens all the time.

Some things that you can do to help get control back include:

- behavioural techniques
- **Kegel exercises**
- psychotherapy and counselling
- reducing penile sensation
- SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) and tricyclic antidepressants
- erectile dysfunction treatments.

Erectile dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction (ED) usually has a physical cause. It is often linked with diabetes, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking and obesity. But it can also be caused by psychological factors such as stress, anxiety or depression.

It is normal for you to experience ED occasionally, particularly if you have been drinking or are very tired. But if you find ED is becoming a regular problem, talk to your doctor. Treatments include counselling, oral medication, vacuum devices, penile injections and implants.

Reduced libido

Your **libido** is your sex drive or desire to have sex. Libido varies dramatically from one person to the next. And your libido will probably change over your life, depending on your age, health, lifestyle and relationship.

Here are some medical reasons why your sex drive may fall:

- reduced levels of testosterone
- chronic illness, such as diabetes or heart disease
- impotence
- obesity
- depression
- ejaculation problems
- taking certain medications.

If you are worried, see your doctor. They can explain your options for working at getting your libido back.

Male fertility

The quality of your sperm decreases as you get older. As you age, it may take longer for your partner to get pregnant, and the risk that you may not be able to conceive at all increases. And there is a higher chance of miscarriage if the father is over 45 years old.

There are other risks with becoming a father later in life. Higher paternal age has been linked with a greater chance of a child with autism, mental health problems and learning difficulties.

The upside to being an older father is that you are probably more financially secure, and know a bit more about the world. The best thing to do if you are hoping to become an older dad is talk to your doctor.

Sex tips for older men

You are never too old to have sex. But as you get older, your testosterone levels decline and you may experience changes in sexual function (such as shorter orgasms, less semen and a longer time between erections).

So here are some tips to maintain a rewarding sex life:

- Keep talking to your partner. Share needs, desires and concerns.
- Stay healthy. Eat healthily. Don't drink too much. Don't smoke. Manage chronic conditions. And talk to your doctor about any particular sexual problems you have.
- See a sex therapist. Ask your doctor for a referral.
- Intimacy is not just having sex. Try kissing, touching and other intimate contact.
- If you are planning to have sex with a new partner, use a condom. You are still at risk of STIs.

Remember

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Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Sex therapist
- Psychologist
- **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9341 6200** or **1800 032 017** or TTY (for the hearing impaired) **(03) 9347 8619**
- **MensLine Australia** Tel. **1300 78 99 78**
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** Tel. **1800 806 292**, Victoria 24 hours, 7 days
- **National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service** (Australia) Tel. 1800 RESPECT (**1800 737 732**), 24 hours, 7 days
- **Victims of Crime Helpline** Tel. **1800 819 817**
- **QLife** (counselling and referral service for LGBTI people) – Tel. **1800 184 527**
- **headspace** (mental health service for ages 12–25) – Tel. **1800 650 890**
- **ReachOut** (youth mental health service)
- **beyondblue** (for anyone feeling depressed or anxious) – Tel. **1300 22 4636**, and **Youthbeyondblue**
- **Lifeline** (support for anyone having a personal crisis) – Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **Switchboard** Tel. **1800 184 527** (telephone counselling, information and referrals)
- **PFLAG Australia** (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
- Better Health Channel has more information on:

- knowing when you are **ready for sex**
- practising **safe sex**
- **teenagers and sex**
- **male reproductive system**

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