
Masturbation

Summary

- 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 to communicate your wants and needs to your partner.
 - The way parents react to their child's masturbation can impact on the child's sexual attitudes and behaviours in adulthood.
-

Masturbation, or self-pleasuring, is touching and rubbing parts of your body for sexual pleasure, such as the penis, clitoris, vulva and breasts. It is a normal and healthy way for people to explore their own bodies and find out what feels good, where and how they like to be touched and how to achieve an orgasm.

Some people think that only people without partners masturbate, but most people with regular partners still masturbate throughout their adult life. Masturbation can also happen between two people (mutual masturbation), which can be a very intimate experience.

Masturbation is a normal behaviour that is seen at all ages, from childhood, through the teen years and into adulthood. Even though it is normal, some people feel ashamed or embarrassed about masturbation, partly because of out-dated myths (e.g. that masturbation is harmful).

Sexual health benefits of masturbation

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

- It is 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 may suit those who do not have a partner, are not having sex with their partner or are abstaining from sex.
- Being familiar with your own sexual responses helps you to communicate your wants and needs to your partner.
- Masturbation is a common treatment for sexual dysfunction. For example, women who do not reach orgasm can learn how to by masturbating and men who experience premature ejaculation can use masturbation to learn control.

General health benefits of masturbation

Some of the general health benefits of masturbation may include that it:

- relaxes your muscles
- helps you to fall asleep
- promotes the release of the brain's opioid-like neurotransmitters (called endorphins), which cause feelings of physical and mental wellbeing
- reduces stress
- enhances self-esteem.

Myths about masturbation

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

- blindness
- mental health issues
- sexual perversion
- reduced sexual function.

Frequency of masturbation

A common concern, especially among young people, is the frequency of masturbation. 'Normal' ranges from several times a day, week or month to not masturbating at all. How often a person masturbates is not a problem, unless it is linked to an obsessive compulsive disorder where the same activity must be repeated over and over.

Masturbation in young people

During adolescence, it is normal for young people to feel nervous or unsure about their developing bodies and sexual feelings. Mixed messages and misinformation about masturbation from their parents, friends and the media can make them more anxious. It is important for parents to recognise that adolescence is a time of sexual development and experimentation, and that masturbation is a way for young people to explore their own bodies.

Masturbation in young children

Young children pick up on their parents' attitudes towards masturbation from an early age. If parents react negatively to body exploration, self-soothing behaviour or nudity, their child can feel ashamed of their body, sexual feelings and behaviours. Studies show that how parents react can also impact 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.
- Try to focus on the setting, rather than the activity itself. For example, if your child is masturbating in public, you can tell them that what they are doing is fine, but it is a private behaviour that they can do in a private place (like toileting).
- Understand that children may turn to masturbation in times of stress. If your child's masturbation is affecting playtime and other activities, you should find out what is making them anxious or upset.

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

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Paediatrician
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or freecall 1800 013 952

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 to communicate your wants and needs to your partner.
- The way parents react to their child's masturbation can impact on the child's sexual attitudes and behaviours in adulthood.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Family Planning Victoria

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.