Masturbation

Summary

- Masturbation is a safer form of sex that can be done individually or with or to a sexual partner or partners with their consent.
- It’s a common sexual activity that can be done by any gender at any age.
- When a person is familiar with their own sexual responses they are better able to communicate their wants and needs to a sexual partner.

About masturbation

Masturbation, or self-pleasuring, is touching and rubbing parts of your body for sexual pleasure, such as the penis, scrotum, clitoris, vulva, breasts and anus. Masturbation can involve a person exploring their own body, but it can also happen between two people (mutual masturbation). If masturbation is occurring between people (mutual masturbation), consent needs to be given and obtained.

Masturbation is a common behaviour that is seen at all ages from childhood, through the teen years and throughout adulthood by people of any gender. It’s a healthy way for people to explore bodies, to find out what feels good sexually, and how to achieve an orgasm.

Sexual pleasure through masturbation can be a very normal part of a person’s sexual experience. How frequent people masturbate is different for each person. It might be several times a day, a week or a month to not masturbating at all. How often a person masturbates is not a problem unless the time spent masturbating is replacing other aspects of a healthy and balanced life – for example school, work, responsibilities, social activities.

Sexual health benefits of masturbation

Some of the known sexual health benefits of masturbation include:

- It can release sexual tension and let people explore their sexuality by themselves.
- It’s a form of sexual activity that’s available to people of all genders, including people in partnered relationships, people who don’t have a partner, people who are not having sex with their partner, or people who are abstaining from sex.
- It lets people become familiar with their own sexual responses which can help them to communicate their wants and needs to their sexual partner or partners.

General health benefits of masturbation

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

- helps in relaxation
- promotes better sleep
- 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 and body image.

Myths and taboo around masturbation

Even though masturbation is a common part of sexuality, some people feel ashamed or embarrassed about

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masturbation, partly because of outdated myths.

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

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

Masturbation in children and young people – tips for parents and carers

People of all ages masturbate for different reasons. It may help with relaxation, it may be due to curiosity and body exploration, it may assist in self soothing behaviours or, in most instances, it just feels good.

In Australia, 89% of young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 report that they masturbate. Providing your child with sex-positive messages about masturbation is important in normalising this behaviour and reducing feelings of anxiety, fear and shame about bodies and sexuality.

Tips for parents and carers include:

- Remember that children and young people masturbate for many different reasons, including curiosity, exploration and sensory pleasure.
- Remember that masturbation is very common.
- Try to focus on the setting, rather than the activity itself. For example, if your child is masturbating, you can tell them that what they are doing is fine, but remind them it’s a private behaviour that they can do in a private place (like their bedroom or bathroom).
- Understand that children may turn to masturbation in times of stress. If your child’s masturbation is affecting other activities, you should find out what is making them anxious or upset.

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

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Paediatrician
- Family Planning Victoria – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100

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