



Masturbation: Questions and Answers

What is masturbation?

Masturbation refers to touching one's own sex organs for pleasure. Other terms used to describe masturbation include self-pleasuring, solitary sex or self-love.

Who masturbates?

- In the late 1940's and early 1950's Alfred Kinsey first published results of over 15 years of research in human sexual behavior. His studies revealed that approximately 95% of males and 60% of females had masturbated.
- The National Health and Social Life Survey and other research conducted confirm between 48-95% of people masturbate.
- Regardless of cultural attitudes and values, masturbation has been found in all societies.

Are there side effects?

- There are no harmful side effects of masturbation. Medical science has debunked many myths formally associated with masturbation, such as hair growing on the palms, insanity, or that masturbation will drain excessive energy from the body.
- Some people report feeling guilty about masturbating. Negative feelings associated with any behavior can threaten a person's health and well being.
- The American medical community pronounced masturbation as normal in the 1972 publication *Human Sexuality*.

Why do people masturbate?

Reasons given by people who masturbate include:

- to experience pleasure
- to relieve tension (sexual tension or general tension)
- to relieve stress
- to engage in sex when a partner is unavailable or does not want to have sex
- to relax
- to learn about what feels good to them and how they like to be stimulated or pleased

Myths

The following are myths relating to masturbation that are unfounded in medical and social science.

- Only people, who cannot find sexual partners; or who are socially inadequate masturbate.
- Masturbation leads to physical problems such as mental illness and growing hair on your palms.
- Masturbation "ruins" a person for partner sex.
- Men will run out of semen or sperm if they masturbate excessively.
- Others, including medical doctors and sexual partners, will be able to tell if you masturbate.

Health benefits of masturbation

A number of studies have proven the benefits of self-pleasuring to mental, social and physical health.

- Masturbation alleviates premenstrual tension for many women.
- Masturbation provides a healthy sexual outlet for people who choose to abstain from sex with partners or who do not currently have available sexual partners.
- Masturbation can be a route to safer sex, to help prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- Masturbation allows for sexual pleasuring for those who are not ready to engage in vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Increases blood flow to the genital region, which can help overall sexual functioning.
- Masturbation can induce sleep.
- Masturbation allows people to become familiar and comfortable with their body.
- Masturbation is often suggested as a therapeutic technique for overcoming sexual dysfunction.
- For women, it can help them learn how to achieve orgasm.

- For men, it can help them increase ejaculatory control and manage rapid or delayed ejaculation.
- Masturbation can help alleviate stress.

Can a person become addicted or masturbate too much?

People often wonder about the normal amount of masturbation. Each person must decide for himself or herself how much to masturbate. Professionals agree that there are no physical or mental implications for frequent masturbation, unless it is symptomatic of an obsessive/compulsive disorder (OCD). Symptoms of OCD are repeatedly performing a behavior to the extent that it interferes with daily functioning, professional responsibilities, or personal relationships.

Behaviors that are performed to reduce stress or alleviate tension, including masturbation, are not considered symptomatic of a disorder unless they interfere with a person's daily personal or professional life or hinder a person from fulfilling their responsibilities and commitments.

References

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If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>