

Masturbation

Masturbation at a Glance

Masturbation is commonly defined as touching one's own body, including sex organs, for sexual pleasure.

Masturbation is a common and safe kind of sex play.

Masturbation has many health benefits.

For many of us, masturbation is a taboo topic. There are many harmful myths about masturbation that may cause us to feel uncomfortable about it. These myths can cause guilt, shame, and fear.

Let's get the facts straight. Masturbation is a natural and common activity for both women and men. Here are some common questions people ask about masturbation. We hope you find the answers helpful.

What Is Masturbation?

Masturbation is commonly defined as touching one's own body, including sex organs, for [sexual pleasure](#).

There are many slang terms for masturbation, including

- jacking off
- jilling off
- jerking off
- spanking the monkey
- double clicking the mouse
- self-love

Masturbation often ends in orgasm, but not always.

How Common Is Masturbation?

Masturbation is very common. Studies show that about 7 out of 10 adult men and more than 5 out of 10 adult women masturbate. It's also common for children and teens to masturbate.

When Do People Usually Begin Masturbating?

People may start masturbating at any time in their lives. Many children begin masturbating as they grow and explore their changing bodies. They often discover early that it feels good to touch their genitals. Children usually begin masturbating long before puberty. Young children do not have sexual fantasies while masturbating, but during adolescence it becomes much more sexual.

It's important for children to learn that masturbating is normal, is not harmful, and will not hurt their bodies. They should also know to seek privacy when masturbating.

If you have children, reading about [how to talk with your children about sex](#) may help you have comfortable conversations with them about masturbation.

Why Do People Masturbate?

The most common reasons adults give for masturbating are to

- relieve sexual tension
- achieve sexual pleasure
- have sex when partners are unavailable
- relax

Many people think that others masturbate only when they do not have a sex partner. But that is not true. In fact, people who have regular sex partners are more likely to masturbate than people without sex partners.

What Are the Benefits of Masturbation?

Masturbation can be good for mental and physical health. People who feel good about their bodies, sex, and masturbation are more likely to protect themselves from [sexually transmitted diseases](#) and unintended pregnancy.

Masturbation is also one of the best ways we can [learn about our sexuality](#). It can help us explore the types of touch we like the most and help us learn how to get excited and how to reach orgasm.

Learning about what feels good to you can increase your chance of feeling sexual pleasure with sex partners. When you know what you like when it comes to sex, your comfort with sex increases. And when your confidence and comfort level are high, it is easier to let your partner know what you like.

Masturbation can enhance our physical, mental, and sexual health and the health of our sexual [relationships](#). Masturbation may

- create a sense of well-being
- enhance sex with partners, physically and emotionally
- help people learn how they like to be touched and stimulated sexually
- increase the ability to have orgasms
- improve relationship and sexual satisfaction
- improve sleep
- increase self-esteem and improve [body image](#)
- provide sexual pleasure for people without partners, including the elderly
- provide sexual pleasure for people who choose to abstain from sex play with another person
- provide treatment for sexual dysfunction
- reduce stress
- release sexual tension
- relieve menstrual cramps and muscle tension
- strengthen muscle tone in the pelvic and anal areas, reducing women's chances of involuntary urine leakage and uterine [prolapse](#)

Mutual Masturbation

Masturbation is often thought of as a solo act. However, many people also enjoy mutual masturbation. Mutual masturbation is two or more people masturbating in one another's presence. In addition to the potential benefits of masturbation listed above, mutual masturbation may

be a safe way to explore sex play with another person with no risk for pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (Because partners are not touching each other, there is no risk of infection — and no risk of pregnancy unless semen gets on a woman's vulva.)

provide sexual pleasure and intimacy before partners are ready for sex play

teach people what kind of touch their sex partners like

Are There Any Risks with Masturbation?

There are no health risks with masturbation. Skin irritation is possible, but using plenty of lubrication will keep that from happening.

If you worry that you masturbate too much, ask yourself this question: Does masturbation interfere with my daily functioning? If it interrupts or gets in the way of your job, your responsibilities, or your social life, you may want to talk with a therapist.

Masturbation and Shame

Many people feel shame or guilt about masturbating. People who receive negative messages about masturbation when they are young often carry feelings of shame into adulthood. Approximately 50 percent of women and 50 percent of men who masturbate feel guilty about it.

Negative feelings about masturbation can threaten our health and well-being. Only you can decide what is healthy and right for you. But if you feel ashamed or guilty about masturbating, talking with a trusted friend, sexuality educator, counselor, and/or clergy member may help.

How Do People Masturbate?

Different people enjoy different things when they masturbate.

Women may stimulate all parts of their vulva, or parts of it, including the clitoris, inner or outer labia, the vaginal opening or canal, and/or the [perineum](#) or anus. Many women prefer rubbing near — but not on — the clitoris because direct stimulation can be very intense.

Men may stimulate the penis, [scrotum](#), perineum, and/or anus.

Women and men may also touch other sensitive areas of their bodies. There are nerve endings that can create [erogenous zones](#) all over the body and people may experience pleasure by touching places like the breasts, nipples, or thighs.

Women and men may also use sex toys like [vibrators](#) and [dildos](#) during masturbation. Read the directions on your sex toys to learn how to keep them clean and safe.

Women and men may use lubricant or lotions to increase pleasure and protect against irritation.

Sex [fantasies](#) are normal and healthy. Fantasies may add to sexual excitement, either alone or during mutual masturbation.

Women and men may fantasize with their own thoughts or with erotic images or language — in print, on video, or online.

Getting to know more about [sexual anatomy](#) may help in understanding masturbation.

What Are Some Common Myths About Masturbation?

There are many myths about masturbation. You might have heard it is harmful or leads to strange behavior. The myths are just not true. Here are the facts:

Masturbation

does NOT cause hair to grow on the palms of hands or other strange places

does NOT lead to blindness

does NOT make sex organs shrink or grow or change color, texture, or appearance

does NOT stunt growth

does NOT cause infertility — men and boys will not run out of sperm

is NOT addictive

does NOT cause injury or harm

does NOT lead to mental illness or instability

does NOT make you gay