

Masturbation – FAQ's

What is it?

Masturbation, or self-pleasuring is touching or rubbing the sex parts of your body (eg breasts, clitoris, vulva, penis) for sexual pleasure, but exactly what you do is your choice.

It is a natural and healthy way to get to know your body and find out what feels good to you.

'Mutual masturbation' refers to masturbating alongside another person. Sometimes people also call touching of other people's genitals 'mutual masturbation', or 'heavy petting'.

Masturbation is a sexual act. This means that if anyone sees or hears you masturbating, they must consent to it first. It is illegal to masturbate in public.

So if you want to masturbate, go ahead! Just make sure you do it in private, or with another consenting person of legal age.

Will it hurt or harm me?

Masturbation is not harmful to your physical health. As long as you are not using unsanitary items to masturbate with, you won't become unwell from masturbating. You will not go blind, or grow hair on your palms! It also won't affect your genitals, nor your ability to have children in the future.

It is important to think about your personal safety. Some people like to use sex toys or other tools to masturbate with, others use their hands or fingers. Whatever you use, make sure it is clean, can't get broken or lost inside you, and can't injure you in any other way. Always wash your hands before and after.

Will masturbating make me mentally ill?

Masturbation is not harmful to your mental health. It won't give you mental illness as some old stories suggest. However, some people report feeling guilty afterwards. There is nothing to feel guilty about, but like with all sex, sex with yourself should feel good. If it doesn't feel good for you, you don't have to do it.

If masturbating is getting in the way of your daily life, your relationships with others, or your sleep, you might want to try to cut back on how often you do it. But if it isn't affecting your life negatively, there is no 'right amount' of masturbation per day, week or month - everyone is different.

If I masturbate, will I no longer be a virgin?

'Virginity' is defined differently by different people, but according to the most common definition (having penetrative sex with another person), masturbation will not make you 'lose your virginity'.

Are there some health benefits to 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 you explore your sexuality by yourself.
- It may suit you if you do not have a partner, are not having sex with your partner or are choosing not to have sex with others.
- Getting to know what you like helps you to communicate what you want to your partner.

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.

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