Masturbation healthy? [1]

Dear Alice,

Is masturbation healthy?

? Hand boy

Answer

Dear Hand boy,

Yes. Stroking the one-eyed snake, polishing your pearl, southern comfort? whatever you call it, masturbation is a healthy (and normal) sexual activity that people of any gender may enjoy. In fact, masturbation can be healthy in a number of different ways: physically, mentally, and emotionally. Masturbation can also be a healthy addition to solo, partnered, or group sexual encounters. Read on to find out why.

Masturbation is one way for you to enjoy your own body, and to give yourself sexual pleasure. It can also tune you in to your own sexual likes and dislikes. You then have the choice of sharing that information with a sexual partner(s) to enhance a sexual relationship. Mutual masturbation, when two people masturbate in front of each other, can also be arousing, and is a great alternative to intercourse without the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases or risk of pregnancy.

Believe it or not, quite a lot of research has been conducted on this subject. And the overall conclusion is that masturbation is universal across nearly all cultures, and that it can have a number of healthy outcomes, such as:

- Relieving stress and releasing tension (including the obvious, sexual tension)
- Providing a sexual outlet for people who are not having sex with a partner (whether by choice or by circumstance)
- Alleviating pre-menstrual symptoms in some women
- Helping to induce sleep, or conversely, helping to start the day with an energized calm
- Strengthening muscle tone in the genital region
- Promoting a couples' level of sexual satisfaction in their relationship
- Providing treatment for some types of sexual dysfunction

One study even found a correlation showing that ejaculating more often (whether through partnered sex or masturbation) led to a lower risk of prostate cancer in adult men.
In case you’re curious, there is also a great deal of information about who masturbates. The short answer is people of all kinds. But to flesh it out a little more (excuse the pun):

- Infants: while not necessarily erotic, many infants touch their genitals once they learn that the stimulation feels good.
- Children: again, not necessarily erotic, but many children also find self-stimulation pleasurable.
- Adolescents: perhaps the classic group associated with masturbation. Many males and females masturbate regularly in their pre-teens and teens.
- Adults: married, partnered, or single, adults ages 18-59 are actually more likely to masturbate than adolescents. What’s more, people with regular sexual partners are more likely to masturbate than singles.
- And then there are many people, from all age groups, who rarely or never masturbate.

While masturbation itself is normal and healthy, there are times when a person might have a negative relationship with solo sex. Certain cultures or religions place such a stigma on masturbation that some people feel guilt or shame after pleasuring themselves. On a different note, a few people feel the compulsion to masturbate so often that it begins to interfere with other life events and duties, such as working or going to school. For people who are concerned about masturbation, it may be helpful to discuss any quandaries with a counselor, health care provider, religious leader, or trusted friend.

To maximize your pleasure and safety, here are some tips to consider when getting a grip on yourself:

- If you’re using any objects to help get the job done (sex toys, cucumbers, what have you), throw a condom on first ? especially if that object will be shared with someone else or enter more than one orifice (use a new condom for each “destination”).
- Plenty of lube = maximum comfort (and less chafing) ? water-based lube is a universally good choice. Some men prefer using lotion on their penis, however women should avoid inserting lotion, oil, petroleum jelly, and anytying oil-based, into the vagina to avoid risk of vaginitis (irritation and/or infection in the vagina).
- Masturbate when it’s enjoyable to you. If you don’t feel like it, don’t worry about it. If you want to do it again, go ahead.
- Try different techniques, positions, times of day, mood music, etc. to learn more about what feels best.

People sometimes wonder if a person can masturbate “too much.” To this concern, the answer is: not likely. As long as you are still able to participate in your normal daily activities, you can feel free to masturbate none, one, or multiple times per day.

Alice!
Category:
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Masturbation [3]

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