Is it possible to have too much sex?  [1]

Dear Alice,

Is it possible to have too much sex? I didn’t see any content on nymphomania. Could you please explain it? Is it considered a disease or something? I’m beginning to think it’s a bad thing having too much sex, but it’s difficult to consider giving it up; just a mini vacation seems forever and this is for both of us!

J

Answer

Dear J,

There isn’t a magic number to answer the question, "How much sex is too much?" Medically speaking, there is no definition of too much sex, just as there is no medical definition for nymphomania (more on that in a bit). Religion, culture, family values, personal feelings, and choice help define what each individual considers "enough" or "too much" sex. Generally speaking, frequency of sex is something to be negotiated with your partner(s). People have different sex drives and what might be too much sex for one person could be just the right amount for another. Having conversations about preferences and needs can help ensure that everyone involved is engaged in the amount of sex that feels right for them. Additionally, there are many ways to define sex [2]. Do you mean penetrative sex? Oral sex? Something else? If for you “too much sex” means many different partners, then there are some specific risks to consider such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), although using barrier methods and getting tested can mediate them.

Sex itself, when it’s consensual and mutually enjoyable, isn’t unhealthy. In fact, it can be good physical activity! Research found that sex stretches and strengthens the body, and when people engage in “moderately frequent sex,” they’re likely to have lower cardiovascular risk than people who are less sexually active. The results also showed that men who have a lot of sex may experience increased risk of cardiovascular issues, but it’s worth noting that the study was conducted among older participants who already had a higher likelihood of dealing with cardiovascular disease due to other causes.
Since you asked, nymphomania isn't a disease, nor is it a clinical condition. The term started in medieval times as a derogatory way to reference women who were seen as “sexually promiscuous.” The nymphomania label is based on the perception of what frequency of sexual activity is appropriate, rather than a medical or agreed upon standard. The term has survived until now, and it’s still used to label women who are deemed “promiscuous.” For men, the equivalent is known as Satyriasis or Don Juanism.

A few questions to consider are: what makes you think you could be having “too much” sex? Do you feel bad or guilty when you have sex? Does it feel uncomfortable (i.e., have you developed chafing as a result of sex)? Are you tending to your responsibilities? Are you still eating and sleeping? Have you been seeing your friends and been having fun? Answering these questions could be a good start to help you define what you might consider to be "too much," and identify what you see as being potentially negative about it.

When having sex results in the neglect of other key facets of life (e.g., working, socializing, and sleeping), it may be considered a compulsion. Sexual compulsivity includes any sexual behavior done in an obsessive, uncontrollable, or irrational way that can become self-destructive. Sexual compulsion may include a high frequency of sex, a wide number of partners, or even excessive masturbation. People with this diagnosis may feel, and indeed may have, little or no control over sex, and sometimes individuals seek out support from a mental health professional, which may include counseling or medication. Again, the major criterion here is when sexual activity interferes with daily activities or responsibilities. For most people with a high sex drive there’s no problem finding balance between responsibilities and sexy time.

If you still think you’re having “too much” sex or if sex is getting in the way of daily activities, you may want to speak with a mental health professional. However, it's very possible that nothing is amiss about how much sex you're having, so as long as it's consensual and you're comfortable with it. In that case, enjoy!

Take care,

Alice!

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