Dear Alice,

Every time I have an orgasm (alone or with a partner) I have intense feelings of guilt. I was not brought up in a religious household and was never told to "wait until marriage". I've been in long term relationships with all my sexual partners so it's not like I feel guilty for sleeping around. It's getting to the point where I'm not enjoying sex anymore because I dread the feelings I have after an orgasm. Is this normal?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Euphoric. Tingling. Pulsing. Mind-blowing. Out of this world. Indescribable. Throughout the ages, orgasms have been described in countless ways and to varying degrees. We have some idea about what people feel during an orgasm; however, less is known about the feelings that come immediately after an orgasm.

Feelings of gloominess or sadness after an orgasm have been widely reported. It's less clear how common it is for a person to feel post-orgasm guilt. Have you ever noticed feeling "down" after an orgasm in addition to feeling guilty? The reasons for "post-coital blues" appear to be primarily biochemical. Several possible explanations have been proposed.

Many people experience a drop in serotonin levels during or just after having an orgasm. Serotonin is the neurotransmitter in the brain that helps maintain feelings of contentment or happiness. Serotonin is great for the mood, but too much of it is not good for sex. Why might this be? The reason is unclear, but one piece of evidence for this theory can be found in the effects of a particular class of anti-depressants. One common side-effect of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) such as Prozac is a decrease in sex drive and a "dulling" of orgasms. Ironically, treatment for severe post-coital depression, where people feel severely depressed for a day or more after having an orgasm, includes SSRIs. Many people report that, while the orgasms are less intense on SSRIs, the post-orgasm crash disappears.

Another physiological explanation for your feelings could be related to prolactin levels in the blood stream. Prolactin, a hormone related to fertility, can spike just after orgasm and this can
cause a depressed mood, as well. One additional physical explanation comes by way of the amygdala, the structure in the brain that regulates the flight-or-fight response. During sex, the activity in the amygdala decreases, but after sex, there can sometimes be a rebound effect, where the amygdala becomes overactive for a period of time. This, too, could be contributing to your feelings.

What is somewhat unique is that your feelings are guilt, specifically. It could be that you are feeling the blues, but explaining or attributing the gloomy feelings to guilt of some sort. When you experience these feelings, notice the thoughts that come up. What are you thinking about after sex? For some people, knowing that the negative feelings are chemically related can itself help reduce the feelings. If this doesn’t work, it may be worth speaking with a health care provider about it, especially if you notice that it’s preventing you from having sex. It may also be worth speaking with a counselor, even if there are no apparent psychological explanations. Some people experience a feeling of shame after orgasm. Slightly different from guilt, the shame is sometimes related to feelings of embarrassment or to fears being vulnerable. Though these may come up more commonly in sex with others, they sometimes can surface even when you are alone, simply because a person can begin to generally associate feelings of shame with orgasm.

Whatever might be causing these feelings, know that experiences of guilt, shame, and depression after orgasm are not uncommon, even though people rarely talk about it. Most importantly, know that noticing the thoughts you are thinking, seeking therapy, and seeing a health care provider may all provide potential solutions.

Good luck!

Alice!

Category: Sexual & Reproductive Health

Orgasms

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