

Erection detection ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am a twenty-one-year-old virgin who has just recently started seeing a girl very seriously. I am frustrated at how my body reacts to the slightest physical stimulus. Holding hands, talking about physical affection, even thinking about kissing gives me an erection. I am not thinking about sex, and we are not going to have sex until we are married, but I can't believe how frequent these erections are. I know it's common for guys my age to have erections, but just being with a girl I care about gives me one, and it's not easy to hide, and I don't want her to think the wrong thing. I used to masturbate and view pornography a lot but I finally stopped because I didn't agree with it. I stopped about the same time I met her. Do you think that my past is causing my body to want something I'm not going to give it?

J

Answer

Dear J,

Ahh... classic reflections on erections. Simply put, the answer to your question is no. Neither your past masturbation and porn viewing, nor your decision to stop sexually stimulating yourself is directly causing your erections. These uninvited arousals may be frustrating, but your body is simply paying attention to emotional and physical stimulation. Plus, the fact that you've got a special gal in your life who makes you (and your body) so excited may not be such a bad thing! Although erections *can* certainly be a cue for doin' the deed, all they really mean is that you're mentally and physically alert, chock full of naturally produced, stimulating hormones, alive, and, yes, very normal.

For sure, releasing your sexual energy by choosing to masturbate may reduce the frequency of your erections — but that decision is entirely up to *you*. The good news is that you've got a whole arsenal of options for those times when you find yourself unexpectedly “standing at attention” downstairs. For example, if your girlfriend ever does notice a suspicious bulge, you could always spin it as a compliment: your erection is a reflection that you're truly happy to be with her. If gabbing about gonads isn't quite your style, though, a few other options you could consider

include:

- Wearing brief-style underwear that is a bit tighter to your body could keep your erection “under cover” (so that it would bulge more like an igloo instead of a tent).
- Strategically placing a nearby bag, notebook, or other item on your lap or wearing a longer shirt or sweatshirt could help keep it out of sight.
- Thinking about your school work, something sad, or another turn-off can encourage flaccidity.
- When all else fails, divert her attention with a romantic (yet distracting) musing. Saying something like “Look at how beautiful the stars are tonight (they’re almost as beautiful as you!)” could keep her eyes averted elsewhere for a few precious moments, and also win you some sweet-guy brownie points.

It may also be worth thinking through how you and your girlfriend feel about erections and masturbation. You said that you’re not planning to have sex until marriage, but you might consider having an honest conversation with each other about what that will mean. For example, you can explain to her that just because you’re getting erections doesn’t mean that you’re trying to “get it on” with her at that very moment. Perhaps opening up with her about your past history with porn and masturbation could also help take some of the pressure off you (and your “manhood”). Keeping your feelings to yourself could lead you to only feel more emotionally (and sexually) frustrated. If you choose to masturbate, consider reading [Beatless in Seattle: Masturbation stops when relationship begins](#) [2] to explore ways to think and talk about what role masturbation could play in your life even when you’re in a relationship. In the end, remember that spontaneous erections are a part of being a warm-blooded and healthy male.

Alice!

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