

Masturbation healthy? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Is masturbation healthy?

— Hand boy

Answer

Dear Hand boy,

The very short answer to your question is yes — stroking the one-eyed snake, polishing your pearl, southern comfort... whatever you call it, masturbation is a healthy (and common) sexual activity that people of any gender may enjoy. Playing with yourself is a fantastic way to discover your own sexual likes and dislikes. You then have the choice of sharing that information with a sexual partner(s) to enhance a sexual encounter or relationship. And, engaging in masturbation has a range of physical, mental, and emotional health benefits. Want more than the short answer? Read on!

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 it can have a number of positive health outcomes, such as:

- Relieving stress and releasing tension (including the obvious, sexual tension) — after all, it feels pretty good!
- Providing a sexual outlet for people who aren't having sex with a partner (whether by choice or by circumstance).
- Providing an opportunity for an exciting sexual encounter without the same risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy through mutual masturbation (when two or more people masturbate in front of each other).
- Alleviating pre-menstrual symptoms for some people.
- 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.

- Helping people get to know their own bodies better.

List adapted from [Planned Parenthood](#) [2] and the [Palo Alto Medical Foundation](#) [3].

One study even found a correlation between ejaculating more often (whether through partnered sex or masturbation) and a lower risk of prostate cancer in men. And while not everyone chooses to masturbate, there's a great deal of information about who does, including:

- **Infants and children:** While not necessarily erotic, many infants and children touch their genitals once they learn that the stimulation feels good.
- **Adolescents:** The age group most often associated with masturbation, males and females masturbate regularly in their pre-teens and teens.
- **Adults:** Married, partnered, or single, adults ages 18 to 59 are actually more likely to masturbate than adolescents. What's more, people with regular sexual partners are more likely to masturbate than people without regular sexual partners.

While masturbation itself can be good for you, there are times when a person might have a negative relationship with solo sex. For example, certain cultures or religions place a stigma on masturbation that associates it with guilt or shame. Additionally, stigmatizing beliefs range from masturbation stunting growth, to causing infertility, and even causing blindness. Worry not; there has been no evidence to back up these claims. Speaking with a health care provider, spiritual leader, or trusted friend may help you sort through any similar concerns around masturbation.

On a different note, some feel the compulsion to masturbate so often that it becomes problematic and interrupts other components of life, including relationships, school, and work. Also, over-masturbation leads to a production of chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine in high amounts. If they remain in the body for an extended period of time, side effects may include lack of concentration, decreased ability to memorize, sleep disturbances, and lethargy. If masturbation begins to interfere with commitments and responsibilities, it may be time to seek help from a mental health professional or health care provider.

If you choose to masturbate, to maximize your pleasure and safety, here are some tips to consider when getting a grip on yourself:

- If you're using any sex toys to help get the job done, consider throwing a condom on them 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 equals maximum comfort (and less chafing) — water-based lube is a universally good choice. Some people prefer using lotion on their penis; however, for those with a vagina, avoiding the insertion of lotion, oil, petroleum jelly and other oil-based products in the vagina is advised to reduce the risk of vaginitis.
- Masturbate when it's enjoyable to you — there's no pressure to do it (or any sexual activity) if you're not in the mood. Try different techniques, positions, times of day, mood music, etc. to learn more about what feels best.

Take a look at some additional Q&As in the [Masturbation](#) [4] of the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

Here's to being the star of your own show,

Alice!

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