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## Orgasms and endorphins <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear A.,

Since orgasms cause a release of endorphins into one's cerebral-spinal fluid and endorphins are also somewhat responsible for the emotion of happiness, etc., is it possible that excessive masturbation and/or intercourse would lead to a depleted level of endorphins in the system that could in turn cause one's affect to become somewhat "flat"? Could a sustained low level of endorphins in the system induce depression and/or mood disorder?

Thanks,

Not worried, just curious

### **Answer**

Dear Not worried, just curious,

Endorphins are a group of substances formed within the body that naturally relieve pain. They have a similar chemical structure to morphine. In addition to their analgesic, or pain-relieving, effect, endorphins are thought to be involved in controlling the body's response to stress, regulating contractions of the intestinal wall, and determining mood. They may also regulate the release of hormones from the pituitary gland, notably growth hormone and the gonadotropin hormones.

Some researchers have learned that strenuous exercise releases endorphins into the blood stream. Others have found that endorphins are released during orgasm, as well as during laughter. Endorphin release may occur with frequent sex and masturbation. On the other hand, there doesn't appear to be evidence that too much sex (or exercise or laughter, for that matter) and elevated endorphin levels deplete the body of endorphins and then result in depression, etc. In fact, the most recent thinking is that exercise, as experienced during running as "runner's high," for example (and, likely, by extension, other activities that cause the release of endorphins, such as sex), can help treat depression — and health care providers often prescribe exercise! Indeed, a Duke University study released in 2000 showed that, for some people, 45 minutes of exercising, three-times-a-week, was as effective in lessening depression as was taking the antidepressant Zoloft.

Although there is no evidence to show that too much sex leads to depression, the reverse can sometimes be true — that is, depression can lead to too much sex. Sex or masturbation can be abused, as can anything — including things we need to survive, such as food. People can also get "hooked" on masturbating or sex, similar to how they can get "hooked" on anything else that makes them feel good and helps them not to think about problems they might be having.

If you're living a satisfying life, have friends, doing well at school or in your job, getting along with people in your life, and you just happen to have a lot of sex or masturbate often, then no worries. BUT if, on the other hand, you feel lonely and unhappy and things aren't going well in your life or you feel anxious and nervous about a lot of stuff or you don't feel good about yourself and you rely on sex or masturbation to make yourself feel better or to avoid any bad feelings you might be having, then you might want to think about finding a professional you can talk with about what's happening in your life and about your feelings of loneliness or unhappiness or anxiety.

In the end, it's up to you to figure out whether or not sex (either by yourself or with someone else) is fitting into your life in a positive way. And if it isn't, the next step is to figure out why. Some resources that might give you insight are any books written by Marty Klein or Betty Dodson.

Alice!

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