Masturbation actually has health benefits

December 5 2013, by Spring Chenoa Cooper, Anthony Santella

Masturbation a natural and normal part of healthy sexual development. Eileen McFall

Conduct an Internet search for "masturbation," and you will find hundreds, if not thousands, of slang phrases for the act.

This proliferation of slang phrases suggests people want to talk about masturbation, but are uncomfortable about doing so directly. Using comedic terms provides a more socially acceptable way to express themselves.

So before we talk any more about it, let's normalise it a bit. Masturbation, or touching one's own genitals for pleasure, is something that babies do from the time they are in the womb. It's a natural and normal part of healthy sexual development.

According to a nationally representative US sample, 94% of men admit to masturbating, as do 85% of women. But societal perspectives of masturbation still vary greatly, and there's even some stigma around engaging in the act.

Related to this stigma are the many myths about masturbation, myths so ridiculous it's a wonder anyone believes them.

They include: masturbation causes blindness and insanity; masturbation can make sexual organs fall off; and masturbation causes infertility.

In actual fact, masturbation has many health benefits.

Good for you

For women, masturbation can help prevent cervical infections and urinary tract infections through the process of "tenting," or the opening of the cervix that occurs as part of the arousal process.

Tenting stretches the cervix, and thus the cervical mucous. This enables fluid circulation, allowing cervical fluids full of bacteria to be flushed out.

Masturbation can lower risk of type-2 diabetes (though this association may also be explained by greater overall health), reduce insomnia through hormonal and tension release, and increase pelvic floor strength through the contractions that happen during orgasm.

For men, masturbation helps reduce risk of prostate cancer, probably by giving the prostate a chance to flush out potential cancer-causing agents.

Masturbation also improves immune functioning by increasing cortisol levels, which can regulate immune functioning in small doses. It also reduces depression by increasing the amount of endorphins in the bloodstream.

Masturbation can also indirectly prevent infertility by protecting people from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that can lead to infertility – you can't give yourself one of these infections!

There is one final benefit to masturbation: it's the most convenient method for maximising orgasms.

And there are plenty of additional benefits from orgasms generally, including reduced stress, reduced blood pressure, increased self-esteem, and reduced pain.

Good for your partner too

From a sexual health point of view, masturbation is one of the safest sexual behaviours. There's no risk of pregnancy or transmission of sexually transmitted infections; there's no risk of disappointing a partner or of performance anxiety; and there's no emotional baggage.

And, only an arm's length away, is mutual masturbation. Mutual masturbation (two partners who are pleasuring themselves in the company of the other) is a great (and safe) activity to incorporate into other partnered sexual activities.

It can be especially good to begin to learn more about what your partner likes and to demonstrate to your partner what you like. Open

communication with a partner will improve your sex life and relationship, but is also important for modelling communication skills for younger generations.

Talking about masturbation also has benefits. Promoting sex-positive views in our own homes and in society, including around masturbation, allows us to teach young people healthy behaviours and attitudes without stigma and shame.

Parents and guardians who feel embarrassed or need extra guidance to do this should seek out sex-positive sources of information, like ones from respected universities.

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