

4 things about female orgasms researchers actually study

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Cardi B's song [WAP](#) and the Netflix show "[Sex Education](#)" place female

orgasms on center stage in popular culture.

But female orgasms are also the subject of serious academic research.

Here's a snapshot of what research tells us about female orgasms, what we don't know, and what researchers want to find out.

1. When women orgasm, what actually happens?

When women [orgasm](#), their pelvic floor muscles [contract](#) rhythmically and involuntarily. These contractions are thought to help move blood out of erect tissues of the clitoris and vulva, allowing them to return to their usual flaccid (floppy) state.

During [sexual arousal](#) and orgasm, women's heart rate, respiration rate and blood pressure also [rise](#).

Levels of [oxytocin](#), known as the "love hormone," increase during sexual arousal and are thought to peak during orgasm.

The areas of the brain associated with [dopamine](#), the "happy hormone," are activated in men and women.

And in women, other areas of the brain are [activated further](#) during sexual arousal and peak with orgasm. These include those associated with emotions, the integration of sensory information and emotions, higher-level thinking, and motor areas associated with pelvic floor muscles.

The right angular gyrus part of the brain [may also be linked with](#) an altered state of consciousness some women say they experience when they orgasm.

What is trickier to determine is how the body and brain relate. We know the frequency and intensity of female orgasms depends on a range of complex [psychosocial factors](#), including a woman's sexual desires, self-esteem, openness of sexual communication with their partner, and general mental health.

2. Not all women orgasm. Is that a problem?

Orgasms are not a big deal for all women, and that's completely normal.

And [21% of Australian women](#) aged 20-64 say they cannot climax. From a simplistic biological viewpoint, anorgasmia (the inability to orgasm despite adequate sexual stimulation) is also not a problem. However, women with anorgasmia [often report](#) shame, inadequacy, anxiety, distress and detachment surrounding intercourse and orgasm.

These [negative emotions](#) might be related to the [long history](#) of suppression, and now celebration, of women's sexual pleasure.

For many women, orgasms represent empowerment. Understandably, then, anorgasmia can leave women feeling as though there is something wrong with them. Some might fake orgasm, which around [two-thirds](#) report doing. This is usually to make them feel better about themselves, or to make their partners feel better.

[More than 80% of women](#) won't orgasm from vaginal stimulation alone. So if anorgasmia is a problem, trying different types of stimulation might help, particularly clitoral stimulation.

When anorgasmia leads to negative feelings or gets in the way of forming or sustaining healthy sexual relationships, it becomes a problem. But certain [websites](#), "[sextech](#)" (technology that aims to enhance female sexual experiences), and dedicated [health professionals](#) can help.

3. Can you over-orgasm?

No! While a [survey](#) run by an online dating site suggests 77% of women have had multiple orgasms, academic research suggests the figure is much lower, [at around 14%](#).

Some women who have multiple orgasms [report](#) their second orgasm as the strongest, but ones after that become less intense.

Just make sure you have enough lubrication to last the distance, as prolonged stimulation without sufficient lubrication can lead to [pain](#).

Around [50% of women](#) in one study said they use vibrators to reach orgasm (or multiple orgasms). Some people say vibrators can decrease the sensitivity of the clitoris, making it harder for women to orgasm through clitoral stimulation that doesn't involve vibration. However, most research finds any [desensitisation](#) is mild and transitory.

4. What use is it anyway?

Evolutionists tend to take [three views](#) on why the female orgasm has evolved: to increase the success of reproduction; to enhance pair-bonding between women and their sexual partner; or the one I consider the most likely, is that women's orgasms do not serve any evolutionary purpose at all. They are simply a by-product of evolution, existing because the male and female genitals develop in a similar way as embryos, and only begin to differentiate at about six weeks' gestation.

Just because women's orgasms do not serve an evolutionary purpose, that doesn't mean they aren't important. Women's orgasms [are important](#) because for many women, they contribute to healthy relationships and their sexual well-being.

What's left to find out?

For a long time, we've assumed details about the female orgasm based on its male counterpart. And it's only [since 2011](#) that we've been able to map what happens in [women's](#) brains during sexual stimulation. So there's plenty about the female brain during orgasm we haven't yet explored.

We've only recently learned about the true size and function of the clitoris. We're also still debating whether the G-spot exists.

Women's sexuality, desires, likes and dislikes are also incredibly varied. And in this article, we've only talked about, and included research with, cis-gendered females, people whose [gender identity](#) and expression matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

So we also need more research with gender-diverse people to better understand the complexity and diversity of orgasm and sexuality.

Whether science can explain all these differences in the complexity of the human being remains to be seen.

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