

# Orgasmic meditation is a thing. Researchers are studying what it does to your brain

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Andrew Newberg, a doctor trained in medical imaging and nuclear medicine, has long studied what he calls neurotheology, the science of what spirituality in the form of prayer, meditation, mindfulness, even

speaking in tongues, looks like in the brain.

Newberg, who is director of research for the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health at Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, said some of his early work in the 1990s looked at the evolution of human religious and spiritual practices. Many, he said, derived from rituals.

"The evolution of rituals in humans really started with the evolution of rituals in animals," he said. Those rituals had one aim: mating. People made rituals a lot more complicated, but Newberg could see overlap between intense spiritual and sexual practices. The word "ecstatic" has been applied to both.

So Newberg was intrigued when the Institute of OM Foundation, which promotes the study of orgasmic meditation (OM), asked him to study the relatively new spiritual practice and offered to pay for the research.

His team's initial findings, recently published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, show a complex pattern of responses in both men and women that reflect distinctive, hybrid patterns of brain connections associated with both spirituality and sexual arousal. Participants also reported intense emotional feelings of connection and oneness. Some described a sense of flow or surrender.

Newberg said orgasmic meditation has been around for 15 to 20 years.

While some forms of meditation are about focusing on breath, a tense muscle or an object like a candle flame, OM calls for focusing on the clitoris. Male and female pairs meditate together. The woman, who is always the "receiver," lies in a comfortable place with her upper body clothed and her clitoris exposed. The male giver or stroker sits beside her. His job is to stroke the clitoris for 15 minutes with a gloved, lubricated finger while fully clothed. Despite the attention-grabbing

name, the goal is not orgasm, although that sometimes happens, Newberg said.

The Jefferson study involved 20 pairs with previous experience with OM and each other. The women averaged 39 years old and men 41. It wasn't physically possible for them to engage in OM in an fMRI machine, so the researchers put them in a private room. Each pair did OM and, at a different time, a control activity for comparison. There were no reported orgasms.

Within about half an hour after they completed the exercise, the woman and then the man were whisked to the fMRI so researchers could see which parts of their brains were active. Those scans were compared to images taken before OM.

The team found significant differences in functional brain connectivity between active OM and the control activity. OM led to changes in a long list of brain areas, including those associated with focus and flow, spatial representation of the self or self-transcendence and both meditation and sexual stimulation. Newberg said the responses more closely resembled reactions to religious and spiritual practices than purely sexual experiences.

"This study has broader implications for understanding the dynamic relationship between sexuality and spirituality," the team wrote in the study. Just as mindfulness has been used in people with medical and [mental health problems](#), Newberg said he thinks OM could be studied in people with emotional regulation issues, sexual dysfunction, pain, depression and anxiety.

**More information:** Andrew B. Newberg et al, Alterations in Functional Connectivity Measured by Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging and the Relationship With Heart Rate Variability in Subjects

After Performing Orgasmic Meditation: An Exploratory Study, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.708973](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.708973)

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