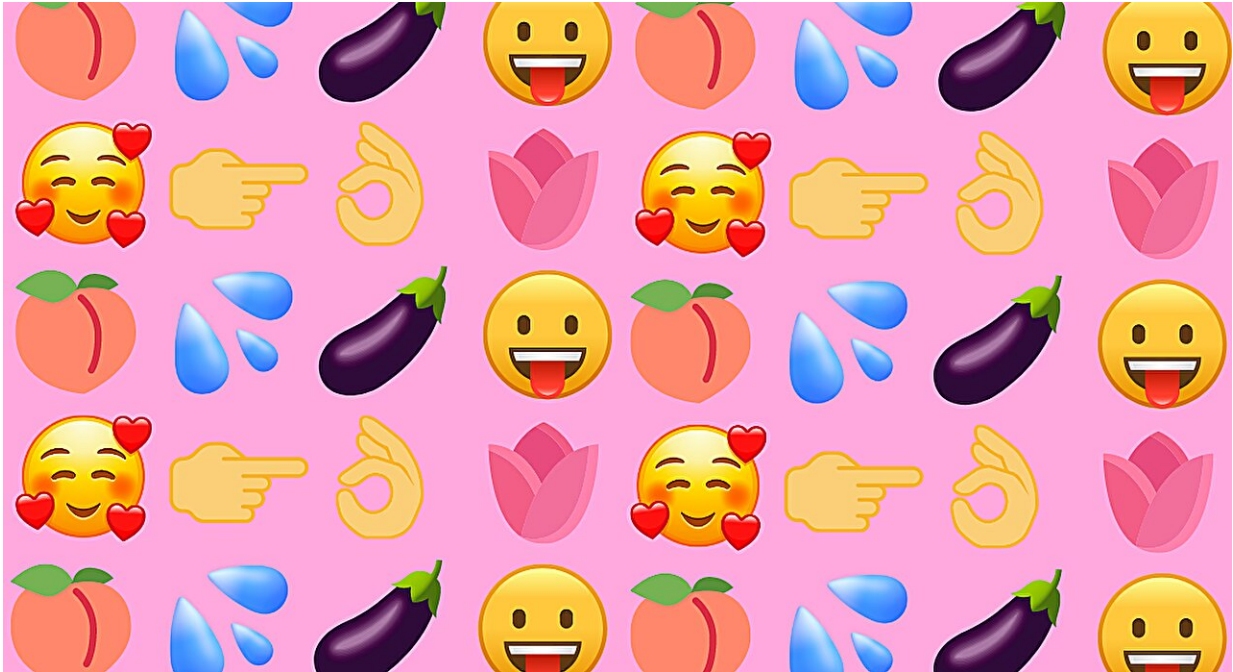


Six myths about sexual health

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Which of the many beliefs, myths and assertions about sexual health are actually true or false? Medical doctor and PhD student Sedrah Butt Balaganeshan has agreed to take a closer look at some of the myths you are likely to have come across at one point or another. Credit: Sascha Kael Rasmussen

Is herpes always contagious or only during outbreaks? Does the pill cause long-term infertility issues? And was female "hysteria" really treated with orgasms by doctors in the past? Every year, there is an entire week dedicated to sex education across Denmark called "week sex" for all ages. So we asked a medical doctor and researcher to dispel or

confirm six myths about sex.

They are abundant and fascinating. Myths, fun facts and jokes. But which of the many beliefs, myths and assertions about [sexual health](#) are actually true or false?

Sedrah Butt Balaganeshan, who is a medical doctor and a Ph.D. student at the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Protein Research, has agreed to take a closer look at some of the myths you are likely to have come across at one point or another. According to Balaganeshan, it is important to avoid misunderstandings and taboos:

"Practicing medicine, I have come across a lot of alternative beliefs and strange stories. For instance, [pregnant women](#) from a number of different cultures will avoid eating pineapple for fear of miscarriage, especially in the first and second trimesters," Balaganeshan says.

"The enzyme bromelain is said to be the cause, but aside from giving some pregnant women heartburn, there is nothing to suggest that pineapples are bad for pregnant women. As a 'newbie' in science, I think it is fun and important to keep an open mind and address some of these stories and myths by checking the facts."

1. Frequent ejaculations reduce the risk of prostate cancer in men

"Yes, there is evidence to suggest that this is in fact the case. For instance, the Harvard Ejaculation Study has been collecting data on men of different ages for a number of years. Their questionnaire-based surveys show that adult men who ejaculate 21 or more times a month appear to have a lower risk of prostate cancer. This includes both sexual intercourse, masturbation and nocturnal emissions," Balaganeshan

explains. "However, a similar study conducted in Australia did not arrive at the same conclusion, so there may be more to it than that."

2. A circumcised penis is more hygienic than an uncircumcised penis

"No. A man who has been circumcised is not by definition more hygienic than a man who still has his foreskin intact. A penis with foreskin does require more frequent cleaning, though. The foreskin is pulled back and the penis cleaned to avoid secretion accumulation or infection," Balaganeshan explains.

3. Long-term use of contraceptive pills negatively affects fertility in women

"No. Long-term use of contraceptive pills does not affect women's chances of getting pregnant. This was the conclusion of a large-scale Danish study from 2013. Some women may experience a temporary delay in fertility after they stop taking the pill, but there was no evidence that it reduced their overall chances of getting pregnant," Balaganeshan says.

4. Genital herpes is only contagious during outbreaks in the form of sores

"No. Unfortunately, you can transmit [genital herpes](#), that is, herpes on the genitals, even if you do not have any symptoms and you use a condom. This is due to a process known as viral shedding, where the virus is shed from skin and mucosa not covered by a condom. Some studies have found that treatment with [antiviral drugs](#) can reduce viral shedding and thus transmission to partners, but at the moment

medication is not prescribed to lower transmission between partners in Denmark yet. And vaccination against genital herpes is still not an option—despite the huge potential," Balaganeshan says.

5. Victorian doctors treated 'hysteria' in women with orgasm

"No. This is a myth propagated by the book "The Technology of Orgasm" by Rachel P. Maines published in 1999. Here, Maines claims that orgasm was central to Western doctors' treatment of women suffering from hysteria up until the beginning of the 20th century. This was disproved by Hallie Lieberman and Eric Scatzberg in the article "A Failure of Academic Quality Control: The Technology of Orgasm" from 2018, which stresses the importance of critical peer review processes and fact-checking to limit the spread of false historical narratives," Balaganeshan explains.

6. Orgasm can decongest a blocked nose

"Yes. According to the study 'Can Sex Improve Nasal Function?—An Exploration of the Link Between Sex and Nasal Function' by Olcay Bulut, MD, from 2021 sexual intercourse with climax can clear the nasal passage just as effectively as nasal decongestant up to one hour after orgasm. Scientists have long suspected the existence of a physiological naso-genital relationship, and this study tested the relationship between sexual activity and nasal airflow. It won the Nobel Prize in 2021 for studies that 'first make people laugh, then think,'" Balaganeshan concludes.

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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