

Orgasm

What are multiple orgasms?

Some individuals experience multiple orgasms in one sexual encounter. Typically these are experienced as multiple orgasms rather than one long continuous orgasm because they are each separated by experiences of "coming down" from the previous orgasm. More common in women than in men, multiple orgasms are associated with heightened states of arousal. In other words, among those women who experience multiple orgasms, the most common pattern is to experience them only on certain occasions, perhaps involving an unusually long love-making session.

There is a great deal of variation across individuals when it comes to orgasm. It's unknown how many people experience multiple orgasms, but there is most likely a substantial minority of women and a very small percentage of men who do, at least on occasion. After orgasm, some women's genitals are so sensitive that the idea of further stimulation is a definite turn-off. Others seem to easily ride one wave of orgasm into another, provided the right kind of stimulation continues. Many women distinguish between orgasms produced by clitoral stimulation and those resulting from vaginal stimulation. So, some such women may experience an orgasm from clitoral stimulation followed by an orgasm from vaginal stimulation—each type of orgasm being experienced differently.

Because orgasm feels so good, it's easy to fall into assuming that more must be better. Those who don't experience multiple orgasms might then envy those who do. However, none of us knows what another person's orgasm feels like. For all we know, our single orgasm might be more satisfying than another person's wave of multiple orgasms. The trick is to appreciate what we have.

Are men capable of multiple orgasms?

Multiple orgasms tend to be associated with women, yet numerous men claim to experience multiple orgasms themselves. This doesn't appear to be something that occurs spontaneously, but rather the men who experience multiple orgasms report having trained to do so.

Because orgasm is typically associated with ejaculation, most men experience one orgasm and ejaculation, occurring simultaneously, and then experience a refractory period during which getting an erection is physically impossible. However, some men say they have trained themselves to separate the experience of orgasm from ejaculation, allowing them to experience more than one orgasm prior to ejaculating. Typically these men say they learned the distinction between orgasm and ejaculation through masturbating, trying to reach a peak of pleasure and release, without ejaculating. Having learned to distinguish orgasm from ejaculation, and isolating the mental and physical triggers for each, these men claim they were then capable of experiencing multiple orgasm during sexual activities with a partner.

Do women ejaculate?

Certainly some women experience an expulsion of fluid at the point of orgasm, at least some of the time. This ejaculation most frequently occurs after intense stimulation of the G-spot, and the fluid itself is expelled through the urethra. The controversial issue is not whether some women ejaculate, but whether all women are capable of such ejaculation if stimulated in certain ways.

Even though many women experience ejaculation, it's still unclear exactly what the fluid is and where it comes from. Chemical analysis has revealed that it has some of the properties of urine, yet is not simply urine, and it has some properties similar to men's prostate fluid. The primary theory is that the fluid is secreted from the spongy tissue that develops into the prostate in men. Beside the chemical similarities between women's ejaculate and men's prostate fluid, there's another bit of evidence for similarity: Women frequently report that stimulation of the G-spot produces a sensation similar to an intense need to urinate, and men report the same experience when their prostate is stimulated.

Unfortunately, many women who experience ejaculation have been embarrassed, thinking that they were simply losing bladder control at the point of orgasm. While that may occur to some degree, or in some women, it's clear that women who ejaculate are not simply experiencing urinary incontinence.

Problems with Orgasm

What is premature ejaculation?

In Western cultures males are expected to hold off their ejaculation so that he and his partner can experience prolonged periods of penile thrusting. However, this runs counter to what we see in all other species of mammals. Typically the male of the species ejaculates quickly, often after only a few thrusts. So, human males may be fighting their inherent nature in trying to match cultural expectations. Clinical cases of premature ejaculation aren't simply based on the man's assessment that he comes too quickly. Perhaps most men would like to prolong thrusting, thereby thinking they ejaculate "too soon" during sex.

Clinical cases of premature ejaculation usually involve uncontrollable ejaculation within seconds of insertion. It's important to recognize the factors that affect how easily or quickly an individual male reaches ejaculation. These include age, novelty of the situation, and length of time since the last ejaculation. In general, younger men, in new or particularly arousing sexual situations, who haven't ejaculated in quite awhile are most likely to reach ejaculation quickly.

Also, men whose recent sexual experience has consisted mostly of masturbation may ejaculate quickly when with a partner. Men tend to masturbate with a focus on reaching the goal of ejaculation, and usually get there fairly quickly. Such masturbation may condition a man's body to respond to sexual stimulation by reaching ejaculation quickly, even if he prefers not to.

Why do some women have difficulty reaching orgasm?

About one-quarter of women surveyed report never having experienced an orgasm. About another one-quarter report experiencing orgasm only rarely. So, only about one-half of women surveyed report having orgasms on a fairly consistent basis. The women with less orgasm experience tend to be relatively younger, with less sexual experience.

Many popular antidepressant medications have as their primary side-effect some form of sexual dysfunction. Often that means the individual taking the medication has difficulty reaching orgasm, even though they desire sex and get quite aroused. So, when trying to determine why a particular woman is having difficulty reaching orgasm, it's important to assess whether the problem is relatively recent.

For women who have never experienced orgasm, or perhaps only rarely, the issue is usually one of learning. Compared to males, during childhood females generally have less experience with masturbation, and they receive more negative messages regarding sex. Perhaps lack of experience or negative associations to sex prevented the woman from learning what feels best, and how to allow sexual arousal to build to orgasm. There are a few good self-help books that simply guide the reader through a step-by-step process of learning to orgasm, or to do so more consistently.

When considering women's orgasms, it's important to note that most women require direct stimulation of the clitoris to reach orgasm. Of the women who experience orgasm, up to half of women surveyed report experiencing orgasm from thrusting of penises in their vaginas, at least some of the time. That leaves about half of women who experience orgasm only doing so from clitoral stimulation. In the article on prenatal development we learned that males and females have very similar genitals, with the penis and the clitoris developing from the same tissue. So, a woman reaching orgasm without stimulation of her clitoris is analogous to a man reaching orgasm without stimulation of his penis.

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Because males typically have extensive masturbation experience, it's rare for a man to have never experienced orgasm. When there is a problem reaching orgasm, it typically occurs only during certain situations, such as during vaginal intercourse. The reason is usually because the male has grown accustomed to a particular form of intense stimulation during masturbation. Then, stimulation during vaginal intercourse isn't nearly as intense. Vaginal intercourse might be pleasant, but not stimulating enough to reach orgasm (or in some cases maintain an erection).

Once medical reasons have been ruled out, the primary reason for orgasm problems in both men and women involves learning. Ironically, however, it's typically the case that women have not learned the process to reach orgasm, whereas men have learned to orgasm to forms of stimulation during masturbation that don't match the degree of stimulation during sex with a partner.

Why do some people experience pain during sex?

Pain before, during, or after sex is unfortunately common. There are so many different possible causes that it's extremely important to consult a knowledgeable physician who specializes in sexual problems and reproductive medicine. The most common medical reasons for pain during sex involve infection somewhere in the reproductive system, scar tissue from previous trauma (most often childbirth or a previous infection), or lack of vaginal lubrication. Still, there are dozens of medical conditions that may result in painful sex.

Anxiety or worry can also cause involuntary tightening of the muscles around the opening to the vagina, making penetration difficult or impossible (and painful). Especially common among women with a history of sexual trauma, such as rape or a painful experience of intercourse, the body responds to sexual situations by protectively tensing the muscles around the opening of the vagina.