

Female Orgasms Myths & Facts

Public Education Pamphlet



The Society of
Obstetricians and
Gynaecologists of
Canada

ANORGASMIA

Definition: Anorgasmia is an inability to reach orgasm and is thought to occur in about 10% of women. Anorgasmia may be either primary (the woman has never been able to reach an orgasm by any means) or secondary (an orgasm was experienced at some point in the past). It may also be global (orgasm is not experienced by any means) or situational (orgasm may be experienced in certain sexual situations but not others; for example, with manual stimulation but not with intercourse).

Some Myths Regarding Female Orgasm

There are several myths regarding orgasm. These myths can sometimes cause problems for women and their partners.

Myth

An orgasm is always an earth-moving experience and there is something wrong with a woman if she is unable to reach orgasm.

Fact

Some women have orgasms and don't know it. Some women do not experience orgasm in the sense of feeling their pelvic floor muscles contract. They do however reach a peak of arousal after which they feel very relaxed and contented, the same feelings other women experience after orgasm. By contrast, women who get very aroused and do not experience orgasm will sometimes feel "nervous" or "edgy" or even an aching discomfort in their pelvis.

Myth

"Normal" women reach orgasm through intercourse.

Fact

Only about a third of women experience orgasm regularly during intercourse. A third can reach orgasm with intercourse but need extra stimulation. A third never achieve orgasm during intercourse but can by manual and oral stimulation. Having orgasms by means other than intercourse is a normal variation of female sexuality. In the past, people thought that "mature" women had their orgasms with intercourse; you will sometimes run across an older book that has this view. However, laboratory studies in the 1960's showed that an orgasm is an orgasm no matter which way you obtain it. How a woman reaches an orgasm has nothing to do with her mental health or emotional maturity.

Myth

Inability to reach orgasm, or anorgasmia means a woman is "frigid" or that there is something seriously wrong with her or her relationship.

Fact

Women who were able to have orgasms in the past but can no longer do so may be suffering from a medical problem or a side effect from medication.

Fact

Women who have never had an orgasm may never have learned what type and duration of stimulation they need.

Myth

If a woman cannot reach orgasm, then her partner is not a skillful lover.

Fact

While there are many ways a loving partner can help a woman reach orgasm, in the end, a woman is responsible for her own sexual pleasure. That does not mean her partner should not be involved. Communication between partners is very important. It is up to the woman to inform her partner of her likes and dislikes in their love making.

Myth

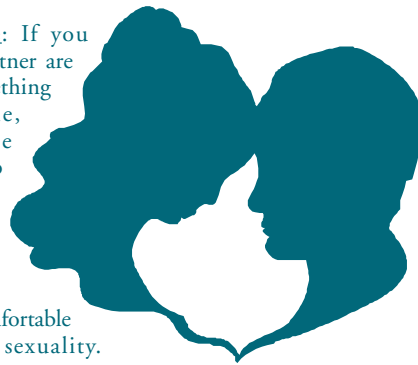
A woman has to have an orgasm in order to enjoy sex. This myth seems to be more common among men than among women.

Fact

Many women enjoy the closeness and physical intimacy of sex and are satisfied even if they do not, or do not always, have an orgasm.

What you can do

- **Relax:** It is possible to try too hard. Focus on enjoying the process, not on whether or not you will have an orgasm.
- **Communicate:** Communicate with your partner your preferences when it comes to sex, as nobody can read your mind.
- **Encourage:** If you or your partner are doing something pleasurable, encourage your mate to continue.
- **Enjoy:** Learn to enjoy and feel comfortable with your sexuality.



Your current inability to have an orgasm is not a reflection of your femininity, your psychological or emotional health. Putting yourself down just makes it that much more difficult.

- **Fantasize:** Some women have trouble concentrating during sex. If that is the case, you may wish to fantasize, i.e., thinking about something sexual may excite you and may reduce negative emotions. If you feel that you are very close to achieving an orgasm, alternate tightening and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles. This may sometimes trigger a real orgasm.
- **Arouse:** For some couples, love making ends once the man ejaculates. Often, at this point the woman is very aroused. If this is the case, you might ask your partner to continue stimulating you with his hands or his mouth once he is finished. Some women feel uncomfortable doing this, thinking that this would be selfish or that their partner would be bored. In fact, your partner may enjoy giving you pleasure. Rather than being selfish, you are giving your partner the chance to please you.

What about vibrators?

Vibrators, either plug-in or cordless, supply more intense stimulation than can be obtained with either intercourse or manual stimulation. They can be especially helpful if you have an illness that makes it hard to reach orgasm, such as multiple sclerosis. They can be used by you or together with your partner as part of your love making.

Suggested Books

There are several good books available with "exercises" to help you reach orgasm. These usually focus on learning to have an orgasm by yourself and then, once you know the desired manner and amount of stimulation you need, you can teach your partner how to please you. It can also be helpful for your partner to read one of these books. Women of some religious faiths may sometimes feel that self-stimulation, or masturbation, is wrong. Others of the same faith feel that since the long-term goal is to improve the relationship then self-stimulation is okay in the short term.

1. **For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality:** by Lonnie Barbach. Written over 20 years ago by a woman who ran groups for pre-orgasmic women, this book has a lot of personal stories. Women like it because they see they are not alone and they can usually identify with one or another of the stories.

2. **Becoming Orgasmic:** by Julie Hieman and J. LoPiccolo. A bit more clinical than the previous book, it also has exercises to help a woman think about where she learned her ideas about sex and whether these might not be realistic.
3. **The Gift of Sex;** by Cliff and Joyce Penner. Written by a Christian couple, this is a very frank and helpful book, especially for women who find some of the suggestions or assumptions in "secular" books objectionable.
4. **L'orgasme au féminin;** Christine L'Heureux, Montréal : L'Aurore, 1979

If none of the books or suggestions are helpful, you might consider asking for referral to a sex therapist or psychologist specializing in treating sexual difficulties.

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada promotes optimal women's health through leadership, collaboration, education, research and advocacy in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology. This pamphlet has been reviewed and endorsed by the Public Education Committee. This pamphlet is in no way intended to replace, dictate, or fully define evaluation and treatment by a qualified physician. It is intended solely as an aid for patients seeking general information on a particular topic. This document has been printed by SOGC (April 2001). Reproduction in whole, or in part is strictly prohibited.



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