

# Debunking the Sexual Myths

## Why are myths related to sexual health still prevalent in this technology era?

Myths and misunderstandings are predominant in the field of sexual health. The possible factors responsible are.

- Taboo and shame associated with the topic of sexuality
- Lack of healthy discussions on the topic of sexuality in the family
- Friends may tend to report exaggerated versions when it comes to the sexual health, to project strength
- Social media or pornography provide an exaggerated picture of sexuality
- Lack of formal sex education

Myths create shame, guilt, anxiety, pressure to perform. It affects self esteem, relationships and sexual health. In today's article let's try to debunk some of the common sexual myths

### Myth: First sexual intercourse is always very painful for females

**Reality:** First vaginal intercourse can result in some degree of pain or discomfort; however severe pain is not common. The factors responsible for pain during first vaginal intercourse are

- anxiety and fear of the sexual act
- Vaginismus (tightening of vaginal muscles) can be a result of this fear / anxiety
- Inadequate arousal (rushing the intercourse or insufficient foreplay). Which causes less lubrication in vagina and can cause pain
- Cultural expectation of painful intercourse increasing the muscle tension
- Force or lack of consent

- Infection in the external genitals- Tight vaginal hymen Gentle, consensual intercourse along with Adequate arousal of female can increase vaginal lubrication and make it more comfortable or mildly uncomfortable Severe or persistent pain is not normal. If anyone is experiencing that, medical consultation is highly recommended

### Myth: A man's masculinity is proven by his sexual performance

**Reality :** Masculinity can not be measured by the sexual performance

- Sexual performance (functioning) is not always constant. It varies based on age, stress levels, health conditions, medications, life situations, relationships etc.
- Fluctuations in sexual functioning must not be viewed as personal failures and it does not define man's identity

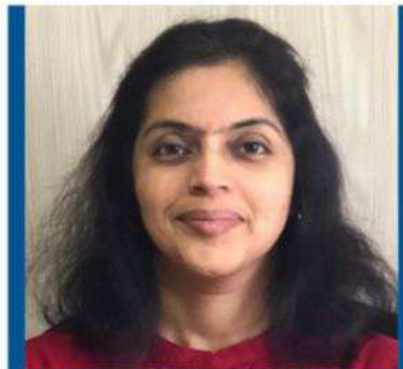
• Harboring this myth creates pressure to perform all the time. Pressure can create anxiety, sexual dysfunctions while taking away the emotional intimacy or connectivity Healthier definition can be " Masculinity is emotional awareness, respect for partner, being responsible, ability to communicate needs, willingness to seek help when needed" and it cannot be judged by sexual performance

### Myth: Masturbation is harmful for the body, it causes weakness

**Reality:** Masturbation is a safe sexual act, not harmful for the body, it does not cause weakness Masturbation is a form of self stimulation of genitals which activates a normal sexual response cycle. It is often used for self pleasure, exploring the body and it can be a safe sexual activity across ages and genders. It has many advantages- it releases stress, can even help to ease the pain, make one feel better

• Masturbation is a period of physiological arousal where the sympathetic nervous system is active. After orgasm, body switches to parasympathetic nervous system, which causes muscle relaxation, slowed heart rate and gives the feeling of calmness

• Secretion of hormones during orgasm ( oxytocin, endorphins, prolactin) gives the feeling of calm- quiet This feeling of relaxation and satisfaction is temporary and is not actually a physical weakness Process of masturbation is not harmful; however myths associated with it can



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result in mental- emotional distress Masturbation can be a concern when it becomes compulsive, interferes with daily life (studies/ work/ routine), done at inappropriate places (in public), or replaces real life intimacy in a partnered relationship.

### Myth: Masturbation can result in infertility

**Reality:** Masturbation does not result in infertility Masturbation stimulates sexual response cycle and in men it results in ejaculation of semen.

This is the similar process which occurs during sexual intercourse; it does not lead to infertility Millions of Sperms are produced every day starting from puberty and continuing throughout adult life. Sperms are not meant to be stored and saved in the body for the future; but rather they are intended to be ejaculated (through masturbation/ intercourse/ nocturnal emissions); Thus masturbation does not cause loss of sperms or does not result in infertility.

### Myth: Sexual intercourse is the main component for successful sexual life and relationship

**Reality:** A healthy and successful sexual relationship is made up of many components and sexual intercourse is one of the component Core components of a healthy and successful life are

- emotional connection (intimacy)- feeling understood, able to share feelings and thoughts, being valued and desired
- Healthy communication, including communication about sex, without shame or guilt
- Consent and mutual respect
- Feeling of trust and safety

- Physical intimacy including non penetrative sexual acts (huggnig kissing, cuddling etc) and penetrative seal acts (sexual intercourse)

- Able to adapt sexual expectations as per age- health conditions- stress- pregnancy sickness etc Excessive focus on sexual intercourse creates performance pressures. Also leads to feelings of failure when intercourse is difficult or less frequent. It also undermines emotional intimacy/ pleasure, comfort which negatively impacts the relationship

### Myth: Size of the penis does matter as it determines sexual pleasure and satisfaction

**Reality:** Sexual pleasure or satisfaction is not dependent on the size of penis

Male sexual organ- penis- is made of spongy erectile tissue, which fills up with blood when a man is aroused and penis gets erected. The studies however have shown that 50-70% of men worry about their penis size.

• As per the large population studies, the length of a penis in a flaccid state can be

between 7-10 cm while in an erect state it can be around 12- 16 cm. Extreme sizes are very uncommon. Micropenis ( small penis) is found in less than 0.1%.

• The individual variation in the penile size and girth is normal just like height or a shoe size. The variation is affected by genetics, and other biological factors during development. However it is not affected by any habit, masturbation, sexual activity, applying external oils etc

• Pornography greatly exaggerates the typical size. Such misconceptions create anxiety about size of the penis In a woman, most erogenous (sexually arousable) zones are clitoris, G spots which do not require deep penetration; but the right touch is necessary Thus women's satisfaction in penovaginal intercourse does not depend on the length of the penis but rather the partner's skills to excite her, emotional connection, trust, and mutual respect.

### Myth: Only men masturbate, females do not

**Reality:** Masturbation is a sexual act common in both males and females Masturbation is common in individuals across all genders. Females also masturbate. It is often done for self pleasure, exploring your own body, reducing stress, release sexual tensions Some of the surveys have shown that 50-75% of females ( and 70- 95% males) report masturbating at least once in their life, while 30-60% of females (and 60-80% of males) report regular or recent masturbation.

The lower rates in females can be due to various reasons such as under reporting, social stigma- shame, cultural expectations etc.

### Myth: In females masturbation reduces fertility and virginity. It also makes women promiscuous

**Reality:** masturbation does not affect fertility and virginity. It also does not make women promiscuous Masturbation is medically safe, it is stimulation of the genitals which stimulates the sexual response cycle in the body ( similar to what happens during sexual intercourse). It does not have any effect on the reproductive functioning or future ability to conceive. Virginity is a social concept and not a medical one. It refers to a person who has not yet engaged in sexual intercourse. Masturbation is generally done as self stimulation, so it does not affect the virginity. Also masturbation usually reflects sexual self stimulation/ awareness; not the sexual behavior with others. It does not increase the risk of promiscuity.

### Myth: Menopause ends the sexual life for females

**Reality:** Menopause ends the fertility for a woman but not the sexuality Menopause is the natural stage in a woman's life when her menstrual periods stop permanently, and she can no longer become pregnant naturally.

• Hormonal changes during menopause bring physical changes in the female reproductive organs. Vaginal dryness, reduced elasticity are common which might create discomfort. However these can be managed effectively with lubrication/ reassurance and consultation with the specialist

• Sexual desire does not get switched off after the menopause. It might change in patterns or intensity. At times women might have more desire after menopause ( due to no fear of pregnancy, more confidence in expressing the needs)

• A satisfying sexual relationship is not only based on the sexual intercourse, but also includes emotional connection, trust, safety, communication, and being valued. Non- penetrative forms of physical intimacy are also equally important. Believing the myth 'menopause is the end of sexual life' can result in feelings of shame - anxiety

- avoidance in spite of having sexual desire. It can impact the relationship as well. Thus it is important to understand that sexual life can continue after menopause as well.