

# SEXtalk)))

Answers to Your Questions about Sex and Relationships

Have a ??? Email [sextalk@u.arizona.edu](mailto:sextalk@u.arizona.edu)

## factoid

**Most Americans report first masturbating between the ages of 11-13 (Janus Report).**

**Q. Is masturbating normal? What is the approximate percentage of women that masturbate? Men?**

**A.** Masturbation has a long, controversial history in society. Stories include the biblical sin of Onan, who “spilled his seed on the ground”; others tell of individuals who masturbated, developing disease and insanity. Inventions were devised to restrict genital access, and prominent community members and health officials recommended behavioral modification to prevent masturbation (the maker of Kellogg’s Cornflakes claimed his cereal would reduce the urge to masturbate). Some believed that masturbation would cause blindness, acne, hairy palms, disease, memory loss, infertility and insanity -- similar myths continue today. Fortunately, there are no proven ill physical effects caused by masturbation.

A large, sexual behavior research study was completed in 1992 by a group of social scientists. Participants included 3,432 Americans (ages 18-59). Results:

Those who masturbated in the past year: Men 60%, Women 40%

Those who masturbated at least once per week: Men 27%, Women 8%

Highest frequency of masturbation among men: age 24-29 group

Highest frequency of masturbation among women: age 34-39 group

Lowest frequency for both sexes: age 54-59 group

Contrary to popular belief, the researchers also found that those who masturbate the most usually have regular partners and have sex frequently.

Women typically masturbate less than men. Reasons may include the role women have played in many societies: timid, inexperienced, nonsexual. In some societies, women are expected to receive sexual pleasure only from their husbands, and have their genitals mutilated to discourage self-stimulation or infidelity. Even in sexually “open” societies, sometimes women are viewed negatively if they freely express their sexuality and desire for pleasure.

Clearly, there is no single answer for masturbation. Seeking sexual pleasure is a natural thing to do. Individuals must decide for themselves. Masturbating does not make you a deviant; and, not masturbating does not make you a prude. Choose what works with your belief system and what makes you feel good.

*References: Michael, R., et al. (1994). Sex in America: a definitive survey.*

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