Orgasms by masturbation vs. intercourse

Dear Alice,

I am trying to stop masturbating because I want to keep myself pure for my future husband. I am just curious, does having an orgasm by masturbating feel as good as having actual sexual intercourse with another person?

Answer

Dear Reader,

This is one of those questions that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

In your first sentence, you mention that you are trying to stop masturbatng. If this is a choice you've made for yourself, it's one that deserves respect. It seems that you have already learned to orgasm through masturbation, which means that you have taught your body to respond to touch. This can be tremendously reassuring to women that they are normal and that their body works, responding to sensation that can result in orgasm. When women have intercourse before they have learned to orgasm, they have little or no information about how their body might or might not respond.

Trying to stop masturbation is challenging because masturbation serves so many purposes; for example, it can help people relax or energize them. Orgasm can make sleeping easier and more restful, and/or it can help start the day with an energized calm. It's understandable if you're finding it difficult to give up masturbation; masturbating and finding sexual satisfaction are as natural and healthy as eating, drinking, and sleeping.

Your desire to keep yourself "pure" may stem from your cultural, religious, familial, spiritual, and/or other beliefs. Being pure can pertain to sexuality or intercourse. It can also mean having good intentions and positive thoughts, caring for others, and not thinking ill of others. If these virtues describe you, maybe it is possible to masturbate and still remain pure.

Masturbation and intercourse are different experiences. Masturbation does not have to diminish the experience of intercourse, nor the other way around. For many people, it is not a one or the other concept or reality.

Physiologically speaking, many men and women say that their orgasms are more intense through their own touch. This doesn't take into account, however, the feelings of being with another person, with his or her arms around you and body near you. Additionally, knowledge
of one’s “hot spots;” emotional state; energy level; stress; the movement, fit, texture, and pressure of whatever’s stimulating you (fingers, sex toys, a pillow, a penis, etc.); your level of arousal; alcohol and other drug use; and, your feelings about the partner you’re with (if you’re with anyone) all contribute to orgasm and pleasure.

For most people, orgasm from intercourse is less intense because their own masturbation pattern differs from the sensation of arousal or response when they are with someone. For women, in particular, the pleasure from masturbation is more intense than both the experience of intercourse and orgasm through intercourse, for different reasons. During intercourse, while a woman experiences closeness, tenderness, and lust, she does not usually get the stimulation on her clitoris that she is used to or familiar with from masturbation. And, according to Shere Hite, a well-respected sex researcher, more than 2/3 of women do not orgasm during intercourse at all. This is neither good nor bad. Women can teach their partners how to give them pleasure in other ways. Many of the related Q&As offer pleasuring options without orgasm.

Alice!
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