Masturbates=sexually active? [1]

Dear Alice,

If one masturbates but does not get involved in any other sexual activities, is that person considered to be sexually active?

Curious

Answer

Dear Curious,

You ask a really great question and whether or not masturbating alone deems you ?sexually active? depends on who?s asking and why. ?Are you sexually active?? is a common question asked by health care providers ? not because they're nosy ? but because they want to assess your risk for pregnancy and any sexually transmitted infections [2] (STIs). Because there?s a higher risk of these concerns associated with certain sexual activities, it?s good to know that when speaking with your health care provider, the descriptor ?sexually active? typically refers to folks who have manual (not including masturbation), vaginal, anal, and oral sex. So, from a medical standpoint, you might not be considered sexually active if you?re exclusively masturbating. On the other hand and outside your provider?s office, being sexually active can mean different things to different people. Whether or not you?d consider yourself as such is up to you!

When it comes to masturbating, it only takes one to tango and that alone makes this sexy solo activity a lower-risk one as compared to partnered romps. In the act of self-pleasuring, there?s just less of a chance to come in contact with a partner?s bodily fluids, mucous membranes (such as a person?s mouth, vagina, or anus), and skin that typically are involved with STI transmission and conception. It is possible, though, that masturbation could lead to infection or disease if done while using a contaminated vibrator, toy, or object [3]. Washing these tantalizing tools regularly and using a condom when sharing them with a partner will reduce the risk of transmitting infectious agents to yourself and your partner(s). That said, even though masturbation isn?t associated with the same level of risk to your sexual health, it does have a number of benefits in common with other forms of partnered sexy behaviors including:

- Improved mood and body image
- Stress relief
- Better understanding of your body ? your likes, dislikes, and what makes you feel good
- Improved prostate health for men
Reduced risk of endometriosis for women
Menstrual cramp relief for women

All in all, whether you consider yourself ?sexually active? or not, sexual activity is a normal and healthy part of life ? even when you?re flying solo. If it?s your health care provider that?s asking, rather than saying ?yes? or ?no?, you can be more specific about the behaviors in which you engage, including masturbation, to determine any risk to your health. In other contexts, it really may be up to you to decide your own definition. If this has piqued your interest in learning more about masturbation, check out the related Q&As and the Masturbation [4] category in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [5] archives.

Alice!
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Masturbation [7]

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