Clitoris is swollen for days after sexual activity

Dear Alice,

I am seventeen, and I seem to be having a problem, though it occurs somewhat sporadically. My boyfriend fingers me, but I never have an orgasm, and afterwards, the swelling of my clitoris is supposed to go down, right? I have had a swollen clitoris for up to three days, with the swelling very slowly diminishing over the course of time. I don't think this is supposed to happen, and it proves to be very uncomfortable any time I bump into anything, it's like a shock wave. Please help.

-Uncomfy

Answer

Dear Uncomfy,

When a woman is sexually aroused, blood flow to the genitals, lubrication, and breathing rate increase, the vagina elongates, and the clitoris and labia "swell." As pleasure builds up, some women orgasm, and others do not. Shortly after orgasm, the genitals return to their unaroused and unengorged state. If there is no orgasm, it takes longer for the physical signs of arousal to subside.

Considering your clitoris is swollen, or engorged, for an extended period of time, it is possible that you are experiencing discomfort from the lack of release that comes with orgasm. Orgasm allows your body and clitoris to go back to their unaroused states, the throbbing usually subsiding more quickly after orgasm. Conversely, without orgasm, all of this takes place more slowly. If you've never had an orgasm, or haven't had one yet, this may result in a more chronic state, with increased pelvic congestion. If this is the case, then reading and practice may be your next steps. Looking at questions in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health archive, which has info and resources you might find useful, is a good starting place.

As your medical history is unknown and it is best not to provide a diagnosis over the web, a visit to your primary health care provider would be a good idea, to rule out any possible infections.
Since you mentioned that the persistent swelling occurs somewhat sporadically, before you visit your health care provider, it may be helpful to answer the following questions. The answers can help both of you figure out if specific situations are causing the discomfort.

- Does this happen as a result of any type of sexual stimulation, including masturbation, or only when your boyfriend fingers you?
- Are you able to orgasm from other types of sexual activity? If so, does this soreness or tenderness happen only when you do not orgasm?

Hopefully, you will be able to identify the reason you are experiencing this discomfort so that you can avoid having shock waves in the future, or at least could learn to enjoy them.

Alice!
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