

Sexual Dysfunction Association

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About orgasm

Does it matter if you don't have an orgasm?

Unlike men, orgasm for women doesn't seem to be a universal requirement for successful intercourse, although of course this varies tremendously from woman to woman. Men may consider that intercourse without orgasm is like playing in a nil-nil game of football. Women on the other hand may enjoy the game without the need for a goal!

Orgasm is an extremely varied event. If and when it does happen it can be varied even in the same woman. We do not know the reason for orgasm. It may be that it can act as a re-inforcer of pleasurable sensations, therefore encouraging us to repeat the event and thereby being sexual with our partners or just for ourselves. The importance of being aware of ones' own body and its responses are important. Whatever the reason, the whole issue of orgasm can cause some women a lot of bother. It has been shown that sex therapy can be particularly useful in the treatment of women who are experiencing difficulties with orgasm.

What are orgasm difficulties?

Consistent failure to achieve orgasm after normal and adequate sexual stimulation can be very distressing for you and your partner, especially if orgasm is the whole 'goal' of your sexual activity. You may feel that you are a failure or inadequate in some way. You may also become extremely angry and frustrated with your partner, even feeling you have been 'let down'.

Orgasmic difficulties can be categorised as primary (never having experienced orgasm) and secondary (previously experienced orgasm, but subsequent inability to do so) which may only occur under some situations (situational). Primary orgasmic failure is relatively common and is more often seen in younger women, but that is not to say that only younger women have primary orgasmic failure. Orgasmic capacity actually increases with age and the ability to become orgasmic once learned is rarely forgotten. Circumstances such as negative emotions and unresolved anger can interfere with the ability and ease with which a woman can experience orgasm. Just like arousal, orgasm (or awareness of orgasm) can be experienced in the mind (cognitively) as well as the body.

What might cause a woman to have orgasm difficulties?

Poor sexual communication, sexual ignorance and fear, inadequate or unsuitable sexual stimulation, relationship difficulties, previous traumatic sexual experiences, mood disorders (such as depression or other mental illness) and a general decline in physical health can all contribute to orgasm difficulties.

Certain medical conditions that interfere with the blood or nerve supply to the clitoris may be implicated in loss of orgasm. There is some medical research currently underway looking at these issues. Lack of ability to 'let go' and to experience orgasm may also contribute. The reasons for this may include a woman's social environment which prevents her biological expression of orgasm (e.g. poor housing/overcrowding living with parents/relatives).

Whatever the reason for the woman's sexual difficulty, whether it be physical, psychological, social or environmental, the effects can be distressing for the woman, and her partner. It may have profound effects on her ability to function in other areas of her life and may contribute to the breakdown in relationships and family life. Sexual difficulties are real, not imaginary problems and they call for real solutions to be found.

Sex therapy

While women can find sexual problems difficult to talk about and isolating it is important not to suffer in silence. Always ensure that the clinician from whom you seek help will be able to ensure that you have a thorough check-up of both physical and psychological factors. Sex therapy can be obtained through the NHS or privately. It is important to make sure that the sex therapist is qualified and abides by the codes of ethics of an appropriate professional body. Look for a therapist who is a member of the Institute of Psychosexual Medicine (<http://www.ipm.org.uk>) or the British Association for Sexual & Relationship Therapy (www.basrt.org.uk).

An invitation

..... to enrol as a friend of The Sexual Dysfunction Association. For a small annual subscription you will know that you are contributing to a charity that helps overcome the problems of male and female sexual dysfunction. If you are interested please telephone or write for an application form or complete our on-line registration form.

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