



“Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.”

Definition of sexual health, World Health Organisation

SAFER SEX

Using condoms for penetrative sex is the best way to protect yourself and your partners from Sexually Transmitted Infections, including HIV. Condoms also offer good protection from unwanted pregnancy. In the text of this booklet, we have chosen not to refer constantly to the use of condoms. Instead, we encourage you to make your own decisions about protecting yourself and others in each instance of sexual activity you undertake.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SEX

This leaflet provides information on how to help yourself improve your enjoyment of sex. It has three main parts:

Suggestions on how to improve sex generally, without doing formal exercises. These apply to both casual and regular partners.

Exercises you can do on your own — for women who have difficulty getting turned on or experiencing orgasm, and who may or may not have a regular partner.

Exercises you can do with a partner — for women who have difficulty getting turned on, or who have difficulty having an orgasm or enjoying penetrative sex.

For all of these, it's important to remember that resolving any difficulties or dissatisfactions with sex involves:

- having sex only when you want to, and only the kinds of sex that you want;
- meeting your own conditions for good sex (e.g. feeling relaxed, not feeling tired or distracted);

- recognising when you are tense and learning how to relax;
- getting the kind of stimulation you like and focusing on this stimulation; and
- being able to enjoy having sex rather than worrying about your performance.

For most of the following exercises you should make sure you have plenty of time — especially private, uninterrupted time. This will enable you to relax, switch off from other things, get into the mood, and make sure you don't feel rushed or under pressure. This is one of the most important factors in the success of these exercises — if you don't have enough time to do them properly, or if you're worrying about what to do next, then you may not get as much from them. The times given above each exercise are just a suggestion for the amount of time you may like to put aside. If you have difficulty finding the time to do the exercises, it might help you to plan some time for them in advance.

EXERCISES YOU CAN DO ON YOUR OWN

EXERCISE *a few minutes a day*

KEGEL EXERCISES

One way of enhancing your sexual experience is to strengthen the pelvic muscles that run from the pubic bone to the base of the spine like an 'elasticated hammock' underneath the pelvis. The contractions of these muscles produce the feelings at orgasm. The ageing process, lack of exercise, pregnancy, being overweight or the menopause can contribute to a weakening of the pelvic muscles. Women who practise these exercises report stronger and more pleasurable orgasms.

You can feel these muscles by contracting your anus as though you're trying to hold back a bowel movement, or by stopping and starting the flow of urine when you're peeing. At first you might find you're contracting your stomach or thigh muscles as well, but with practice you can squeeze just the pelvic muscles.

Begin by squeezing and releasing these muscles fifteen times, a couple of times a day. You can do this without anyone noticing, for example while driving, watching TV or reading. Continue doing the Kegel exercises every day, gradually increasing the number

until you can do about 50. At this point, instead of releasing the muscles immediately, you can hold the contractions for a few seconds. You can do both the long and short Kegels a couple of times a day, or alternate between them.

Most people don't notice results until after about a month or six weeks, but if you practise them consistently you will feel the difference.

To check the improvement in the strength of these muscles, you can put two fingers into your vagina and feel the strength of the squeeze as you contract the muscles.

EXERCISE *15 minutes*

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR BODY

Sensual or sexual pleasure results from the interactions between physical sensations and thoughts and feelings. Knowing how to both give pleasure to your body and accept pleasure from it can help you get what you want sexually with a partner or on your own.

Reserve 30 minutes for yourself and relax in a way that you enjoy — perhaps by having a bath or by doing some relaxation exercises. Create an atmosphere that you find pleasing, for example using lighting, temperature and sound. When you're naked and comfortable, warm some body oil or lotion in your hands and then smooth it on your body. You could start with your arms and hands and move down to the rest of your body. Or, if you prefer, start with your feet and legs. Try to focus your attention on the feel of your hands on your body. Experiment with touching yourself in different ways, and try to make your body feel good rather than turned on. Let your hands touch your breasts, stomach, hips, inner thighs. Be gentle with yourself. Remember, the point of the exercise is to enjoy the pleasure from your body that this touch is giving you.

Try to practise this exercise as many times per week as you can fit it in without feeling pressured. It won't be easy to relax and enjoy the exercise if it feels like a chore.

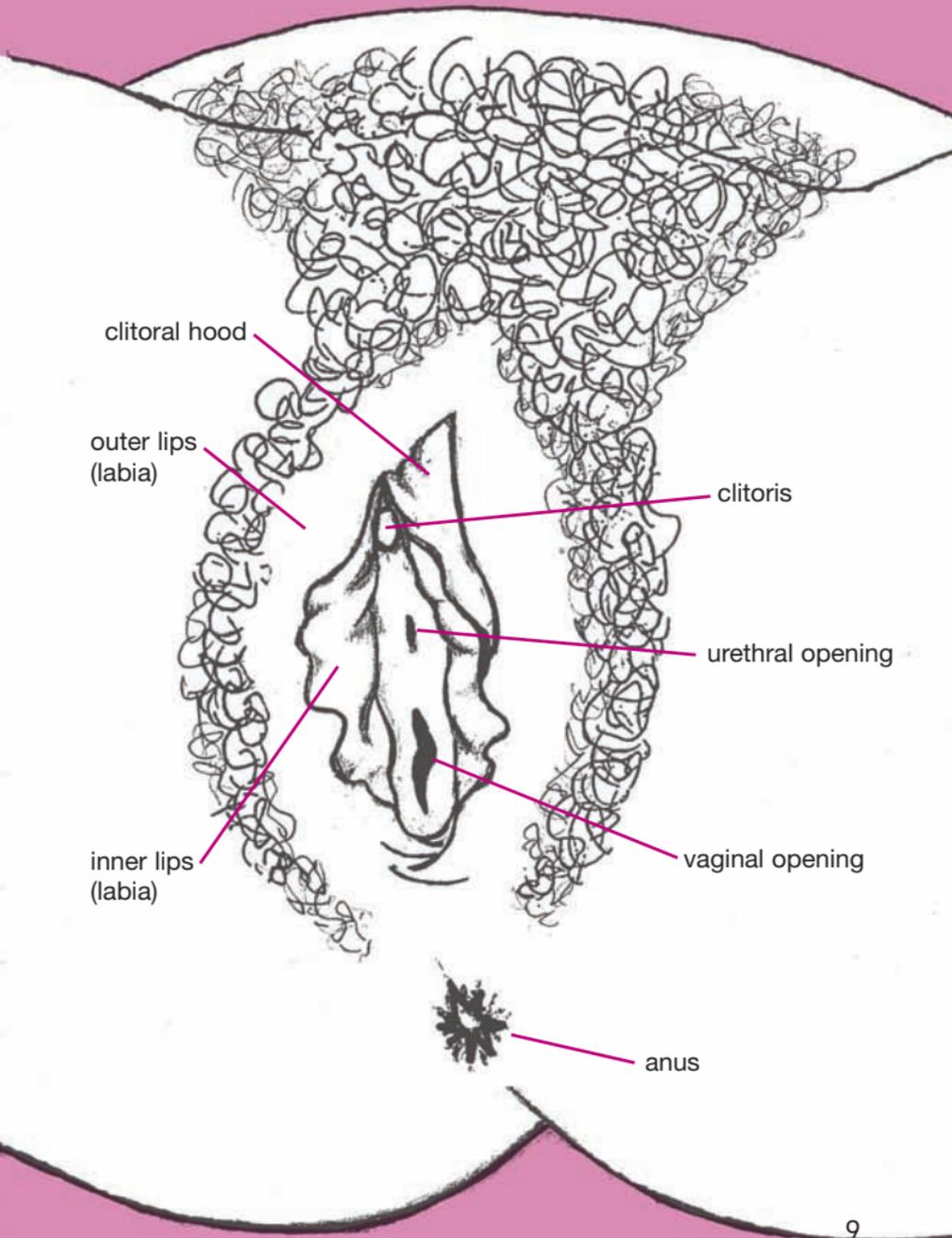


EXERCISE *20 minutes*

ENJOYING MORE INTIMATE TOUCH

The aim of this exercise is to discover the kinds of touch you find most pleasurable, and to practise focusing on the sensations you feel when you touch yourself in these ways. Having an orgasm is not the point of this exercise, but if you want to let yourself have one, that's OK.

Get yourself comfortable and relaxed, as you did for the previous exercise, and begin by touching your body as before. When you feel ready, begin more intimate touching — touch and stroke your outer and inner vaginal lips and the surrounding area. You can use lube (lubricant) if you want to, which you can buy from a chemist or any sex shop. Experiment with different pressures and rhythms. Explore your clitoris and the surrounding tissue. Some women like to pull back the hood covering the clitoris and touch it directly, while others find this too intense and prefer non-direct stimulation. Try both of these and see which feels best. Start with a light touch, then gradually increase the pressure. Try rubbing up and down, side to side, or in a circular motion. If these feel too intense, try using the heel or the palm of your hand instead. Or cup your hand over your clitoral area and vibrate it, or brush your fingers to and fro across your clitoris.



WHAT HAPPENS TO MY BODY WHEN I AM AROUSED?

Sexual response and desire varies greatly from person to person and from day to day. However, there are some physiological changes that you may notice as you begin to get turned on (as well as some you won't be able to see from the outside).

When you are aroused, your heart rate and blood pressure increase. Your breasts may enlarge and your nipples may become erect and more responsive to touch. Blood flow to the vulva increases, and as a result your clitoris may become erect, retract under the hood or seem bigger than usual. The labia swell and darken in colour and you may notice that you start to get wet as your vaginal walls produce lubrication. The vagina expands in size and the uterus lifts up, which acts to lengthen the vagina further. Your sphincter muscles around your anus and urethra, and the pelvic floor muscles around your vagina may relax and/or contract. You may also notice that other muscles in your body may become slightly more tense. You may feel your heart beating faster, and you may start to breathe faster and deeper.

If you reach orgasm, you will feel a series of pleasurable muscle contractions across the 'orgasmic platform' (across the vagina, uterus and anus) which

vary from woman to woman and from day to day in terms of duration and intensity. Many women can have more than one orgasm in succession if the stimulation continues, and some women ejaculate on orgasm, particularly if the stimulation they have received has been focused on the G-spot (to which we will return later on).

All of the physical changes mentioned above work to prepare your body for sexual contact, and to make any touch feel comfortable and enjoyable. It is important that you give your body time to react to these changes, so that you don't feel any discomfort during a sexual experience. Look out for these changes in your own body, and remember that other factors can affect them, for instance the effects of the menopause or certain medications. These could mean that you lubricate less, but that won't necessarily mean you're not turned on.

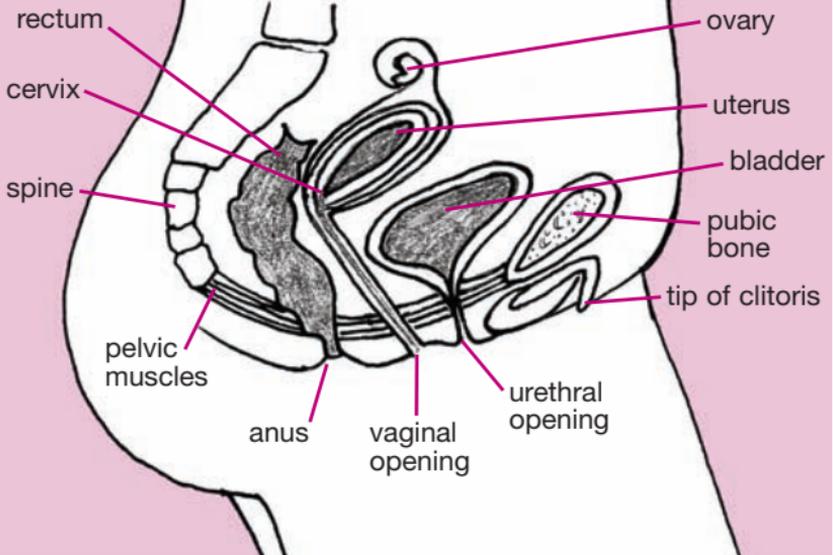
If you feel very close to orgasm and would like extra stimulation, then you may want to try a vibrator. Lots of women use vibrators, either alone or with a partner, and find that they are the easiest way to have an orgasm. This is because they can produce subtle but intense stimulation of the clitoris. You can buy a vibrator from any erotic store (see the useful addresses and contacts section at the end of this

leaflet). They vary in size, colour, and shape and are battery-powered. You can use your vibrator in the same way that you can use your fingers/hand in the exercise described above, or in any way that feels pleasurable to you.

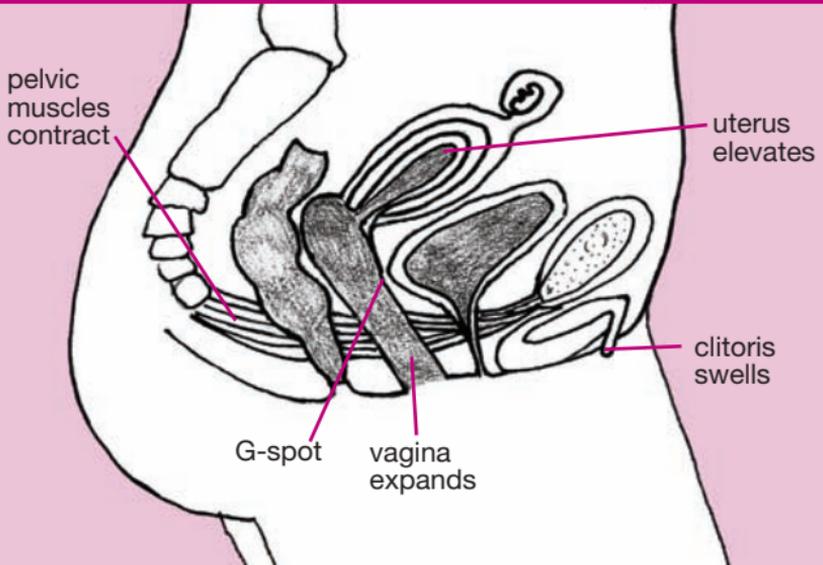
Most women need clitoral stimulation to have an orgasm during arousal, but it's not just about the clitoris! Many women enjoy the stimulation of having something inside the vagina too. Explore yourself by putting a finger inside your vagina, and feeling the different points of sensitivity inside. About two thirds of the way up on the front wall you may discover an area that feels more sensitive, and which produces an intense feeling when touched. This area is sometimes known as the G-spot. Some women find stroking of this area can lead to orgasm. You could try it, and see how it feels to you.

Opposite are two diagrams showing the changes that occur internally when a woman becomes aroused, or turned on.

Internal view of female genitals before arousal



Internal view of female genitals during arousal



POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *What if I'm worried about touching myself in this way? When I was a child I was told not to.*

Masturbation can provide a healthy release for sexual tension and can be a good opportunity to learn about (and keep in touch with) your sexuality. There is no medical evidence that masturbating causes any harm or reduces a person's desire for sex with their partner. In fact, some women feel that discovering what helps them enjoy sex through their own explorations helps them to have better sex with their partners.

- *What if my mind keeps wandering and it's hard to relax or focus on the sensations?*

This is natural. Just keep trying to bring your attention back to the exercise. It's important that you aren't tense, in a hurry, or very preoccupied with something else. If you are, or if you don't really have enough time to do the exercise, leave it for a time when you do. You may be feeling nervous or self-conscious if this is the first time you have explored/enjoyed your sexuality in this way. Or maybe you are putting pressure on

yourself to feel turned on or have an orgasm. Try instead to relax and enjoy the sensations — worrying about how turned on you are makes it less likely that you will be!

Developing fantasies in your mind can help you to enjoy masturbation more, both by helping you feel more turned on, and by keeping your mind focused. You could experiment, imagining different partners and scenarios. Give yourself permission to not judge yourself on these fantasies. Fantasies are not reality! You can experiment with different settings, partners and activities that you may never wish to try in real life. If you find fantasising difficult, you could experiment with erotic writing or images to stimulate your imagination.

NEXT STEPS

The next step involves doing some exercises with a partner. If you're in a relationship and have stopped having physical contact because of sexual problems, then it is important to re-establish that contact before you carry on. If this applies to you and your partner, read the section on re-establishing physical affection on page 28 and follow the suggestions there before continuing with the following exercises.

EXERCISES YOU CAN DO WITH A PARTNER

Before starting any of the following exercises, both you and your partner should read and discuss them. Talk about your feelings about doing the exercises and sort out any issues that are raised. It's common for couples to have some disagreements, but if you sort them out as soon as they appear, you'll get more benefit from the programme.

These exercises are like a training programme. You won't need to do them forever, but how long you need to do them depends mainly on how often you do them, so you need to work out an agreement about frequency. However, don't do more than one exercise a day — twice a week is a good starting point.

You also need to agree that neither of you will push the other faster than they want to go. It's important not to rush through the exercises, as this just puts pressure on you both. The point of this is to allow yourselves to enjoy taking things at a pace that feels right for you, not what you think someone else expects. It may feel a little strange to begin with, because you're doing things differently than before. Only stop if you feel uncomfortable, and, if this happens, do something else before going back to the activity. You could agree with your partner beforehand what you will do

together to relax before starting again — such as cuddling, holding hands or talking.

Don't make these exercises the only contact you have with your partner, either physically or emotionally. Make sure you also have mutually satisfying time when you're not doing the exercises, and that you express affection physically without needing to end up having sex.

You might want to do the exercises both ways round so that it feels fair, or you might prefer to focus on the partner who would benefit most from them — it's up to you to decide together how you use them. The minutes given for each exercise are just suggestions.

“Too much of a good thing can be wonderful.”

Mae West



EXERCISE *20-30 minutes*

SENSUAL TOUCH WITHOUT TOUCHING GENITALS

This exercise will help you feel comfortable with more intimate touch if you have been feeling anxious about sex, or when you and your partner want to get 'reacquainted' with each other's bodies. Talk to each other before you start the exercise about what you both feel more or less comfortable with, so you can ensure that you make the experience as positive as possible.

Have your partner arouse you by touching your body, not including your genitals, using their hands, mouth, hair or anything else — they can be as creative as they like! Focus on the sensations and feelings you get from different kinds of touch — these may include feeling sexually aroused as well as other sensations, such as ticklishness. Give feedback and suggestions, without being critical. If you find your mind wandering, bring it back to focusing on the sensations. Your partner's job is to check out with you what you like (and don't like) and to respond to your suggestions.

You can take it in turns to be the 'giver' or the 'receiver'. Use this exercise to develop communication between you and your partner about what touch feels best to each of you. Focusing on the sensations in your genitals during these activities will keep your mind

where it belongs during sex and away from negative thoughts and performance worries.

This exercise should not include genital touching, sex or orgasm. It is important that both you and your partner understand this rule and stick to it, as it helps to take away anxiety, especially if one of you has been finding sex difficult recently. If either you or your partner try and bend the rules, you may undo the progress you have made, and make it harder to trust each other in these exercises in the future.

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *Help! I feel embarrassed being naked in front of my partner!*

Try at first to do the exercise clothed or partly clothed, then gradually aim to do the exercises naked when you feel more comfortable. Some couples find it relaxing to take a warm bath or a shower together first. Talk to your partner about your worries. It may be that they have similar worries and together you can find a solution.

After you have practised this exercise for a couple of weeks and feel comfortable, talk together about your feelings about moving on to the next exercise.

EXERCISE *30 minutes*

SENSUAL TOUCH INCLUDING GENITALS

Now you've explored the kinds of non-sexual touching you both enjoy, use the same turn-taking format to explore more intimate touch.

Get yourselves relaxed and comfortable, enjoying touching each other without genital contact. Whoever is the 'giver' first can gradually move to more intimate exploration from the touch that they will be used to giving by now.

Having done the previous exercise, you will have a lot of experience of giving each other feedback about touch that feels good and touch that feels less good. You may have also done the exercises on your own, and so will be more aware of the kind of touch that you like.

Keep your attention on the sensations you feel and what it feels like to be touched in this way. Remember that The point of this exercise is not to produce orgasms, but rather to learn or re-learn how to be intimate and make each other feel good. If an orgasm happens as a by-product of this, that's fine, but do not make it a focus.

Do this exercise once or twice a week for a couple of weeks, or until you feel completely comfortable being touched. As you and your partner become more in tune with each other's bodies, you should find that your anxiety decreases and your enjoyment increases. Use what you have learned in conversations about your sex life and where you would like it to go in the future.

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *What if I can't stay relaxed and enjoy the sensations during this exercise?*

It may be that you can't get your partner to stimulate you in ways you like, in which case you need to talk about what's going wrong. Perhaps you need to go back to one of the solo exercises and focus on finding the kinds of touch you enjoy. If you can enjoy this touch when you're on your own, but not when you are with your partner, then it could be something in your relationship that's getting in the way. If you want to explore this further, you might want to contact one of the organisations listed on page 20.

You won't always feel like you want sensual touch or sex. If this happens, let your partner know. You

could say something like, “I guess I just don’t feel like it today.” Then discuss what you’d both like to do instead. They might want you to sexually stimulate them, or you might want to talk about what’s happening, or go and do something else together.

- *What if one or both of us gets turned on during the exercise, but we’ve agreed not to have sex?*

Sticking to the rules is important, as it allows you both to relax and not focus on penetration or orgasms. Agree beforehand what to do if this happens. For example, you could masturbate together or separately, or you could cuddle until these feelings subside.

Once you’re comfortable with these exercises, you will be better able to enjoy sexual contact with your partner and find it easier to communicate about sex. After doing this programme, many couples find that the sex they have is less focused on orgasms, and that this takes the pressure off and makes it more enjoyable, more creative and more satisfying.

- *What if when my partner and I move on to penetration, it hurts me?*

If you are not turned on enough, then penetration with a finger or a penis can hurt. This is because, as you get aroused, physical changes take place in the vagina — you become wet, and your vagina expands and lengthens to accommodate a penis. Take more time to get turned on and let your partner know about this. If pain on penetration is often a problem for you, or has been a problem in the past and you get very worried about it now, you may want to read another leaflet, entitled ***Difficulties with Penetration or Painful Sex?***, which you can find in the leaflet racks at the clinic, or ask a clinician for a copy.

- *What if my partner and I want to try anal penetration?*

Like the clitoris, the tissues of the anus and rectum become more sensitive to touch as you become turned on. The rectum also expands, not as readily as your vagina, but enough to fit a finger, dildo or penis, or even something bigger. Unlike the vagina, the rectum does not produce its own lubrication, and the lining of the rectum is delicate and can tear easily, so care must be

taken. Use condoms, latex gloves and plenty of lubrication.

Men have a prostate gland, located on the front wall of the rectum several inches from the opening, which responds to stimulation in the same way as the G spot in the vagina. But you don't need to have a prostate gland for anal penetration to be pleasurable. Many women say they can experience intense orgasms through anal penetration, especially when combined with clitoral stimulation.

For anal penetration, the same rules apply as for any other form of sexual contact you have with a partner. Set your own limits, and communicate about your wants, needs, likes and dislikes.

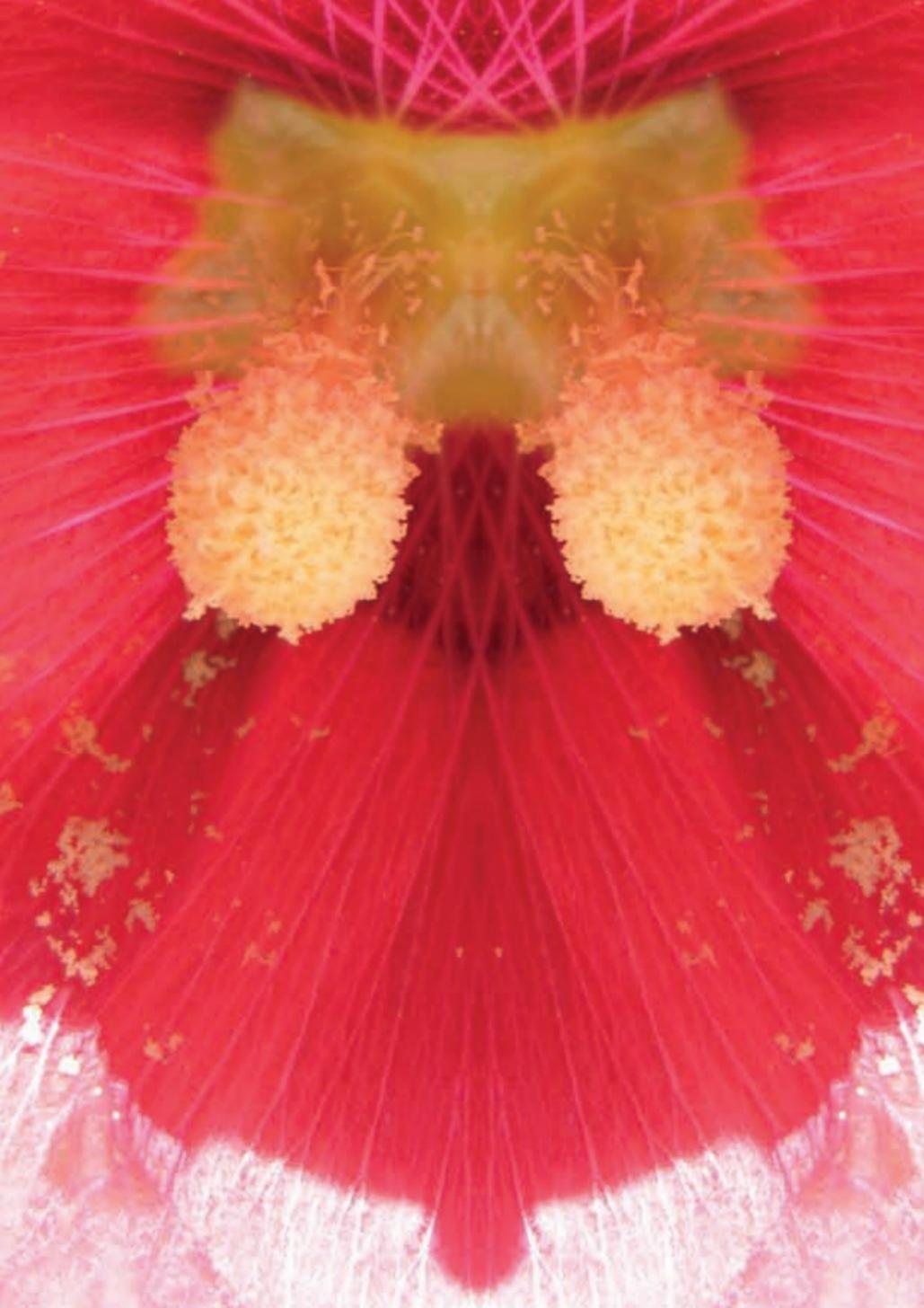
- *What if my partner wonders why I haven't had an orgasm?*

If it's a regular partner, you may want to find a way of talking to them about it, and explain that you don't always come, and that it isn't their fault if you don't. It's also a good idea not to apologise — you haven't done anything wrong and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Women don't always come every time they have sex. Some women fake orgasms,

because they worry about what their partner will think. This is understandable, but you may want to ask yourself if faking it is helping you, especially if there is something your partner could do differently to help you have an orgasm. Perhaps tell them what's happening, as honestly and directly as you can — this is respectful to both yourself and them, and may help you to feel more comfortable.

All women can have difficulties with their sex lives, ranging from pain or discomfort, to difficulties having an orgasm to just not feeling like sex from time to time. Many women experience some of these, and can change through trying some of the exercises described here.

If you would like further help, you could consider asking your doctor to refer you to a psychosexual counsellor or therapist, or contact one of the organisations listed on page 31.





With casual partners, it can be helpful to read the partner exercises for ideas about how to deal with any possible problems. It's up to you to decide whether you want to tell your partner that you want to do an exercise, whether you say you'd like to try such-and-such, or whether you simply say you'd like to take things more slowly for a bit.

During any kind of physical contact with a partner, you should be focusing your attention on any pleasurable sensations you feel, but also noticing whether you're tense or relaxed. If you're tense, do something to get more relaxed (take some deep breaths, consciously relax your muscles, talk about it, slow down the pace), even during non-sexual contact.

Try to focus on enjoying other sexual activities than penetration. You may even find that you enjoy other activities as much as, or more than, penetration. If this is the case, you may want to vary the activities you do with a partner. Not everyone has penetrative sex all of the time, and some couples choose not to have penetrative sex at all.

RE-ESTABLISHING PHYSICAL AFFECTION

If you are in a relationship and have stopped having physical contact because of sexual problems, then it is important to re-establish that contact.

If there are any relationship issues that are getting in the way, you may need to work these out first. If this is something you would like further help with, there is a list on page 31 of organisations that offer psychosexual/relationship therapy.

You can begin to reconnect physically by holding hands, hugging, taking baths or showers together, doing light body-rubs, or anything else that both of you are comfortable with. You need to feel comfortable being physical with your partner, and these kinds of activities are a good way to get there.

If you feel tense or anxious about the physical contact, go back to something that feels more comfortable until you feel okay to try the contact again.

Make sure that the conditions you need for sexual activity are met. These may include a comfortable environment, privacy, knowing you have sufficient time or trusting your partner to stop if you want them to.

LITERATURE AND SEX TOYS:

Sh!

(sex shop for women run by women)

39 Coronet St, London

www.sh-womenstore.co.m 020 7613 5458

RECOMMENDED READING:

Overcoming Sexual Problems; A self-help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques.

Vicky Ford

A Woman's Guide to Overcoming Sexual Fear and Pain

Aurelie Jones Goodwin

Becoming Orgasmic — A Sexual Growth Programme for Women

Julia Helman, Leslie Lopicolo

The Relate Guide to Sex In Loving Relationships

Sarah Litvinoff

Women's Sexualities: Generations of Women Share Intimate Sexual Secrets of Sexual Self-acceptance

Carol Rinkleib Ellison

The Whole Lesbian Sex Book

Felice Newman

FINDING PSYCHOSEXUAL/RELATIONSHIP THERAPY:

For further information about the services we provide, including psychosexual therapy, STI testing and sexual health advice, visit www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk

British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy (BASRT)

Information and lists of individual and couple psychosexual therapists
<http://www.basrt.org.uk> 020 8543 2707

RELATE

Psychosexual counselling for men and women of all sexualities www.relate.org.uk

Relationship Counselling for London

The Tavistock Centre,
Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA
www.counselling4london.com 020 8938 2431



This booklet has been written by the Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy Team and edited, designed and illustrated by the Good Sexual Health Team. Both are part of Camden Provider Services.

For further information about the services we provide, visit www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk

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www.camdenproviderservices.nhs.uk**

OTHER TITLES AVAILABLE:

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SEX
for men and their partners

WORRIED ABOUT STAYING HARD?
for men and their partners

ANAL PLAY
for men and for women

PROBLEMS CONTROLLING WHEN YOU COME?
for men and their partners

**DIFFICULTIES WITH PENETRATION
OR PAINFUL SEX?**
for women and their partners