

MASTURBATION

The Myths and Facts

INTRODUCTION

Masturbation means touching your own genitals to gain sexual pleasure, although other 'erogenous zones' (any areas of the body that are sensitive to sexual stimulation) may also be involved. Other terms for masturbation include 'solo sex' or 'wanking'. 'Mutual' masturbation is when two or more people touch, caress, massage or stroke the genitals of each other. Sometimes sex toys may be involved.

Masturbation is a natural, healthy expression of sexuality, which can have a large number of benefits, not least that of sexual pleasure. In terms of 'safer sex' masturbation is about as safe as you can get.

However, masturbation has been viewed negatively for centuries by many cultures and communities as a deviant, dangerous or 'sinful' practice. For example, in 1723 a doctor anonymously published a text warning against the dangers of 'defiling' your own body, and offered a series of cures (that had to be purchased!). During the late 1800s and early 1900s some breakfast cereals were developed in an effort to curb the masturbatory impulses of young boys through encouraging a healthy diet;

Lord Baden Powell, founder of the Scouts in 1907, also believed strongly in the negative effects of masturbation and counselled boys and young men against it.

Although there has been some shift in attitudes towards masturbation, there continues to be an overall negative view of the practice culturally, with several myths being perpetuated. Many children also continue to be told off and punished for masturbating or exploring their genitals, and this chastisement may cause physical and emotional problems for some people into their adult years.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide some facts and to dispel some of the myths around masturbation in order to lessen any anxieties, shame or guilt that people may experience – it is a natural, healthy practice!