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# Sexy health

WOMEN'S WORLD  
By Dr NOR ASHIKIN MOKHTAR

## **Sex is good for your health, seriously.**

WE have come a long way since the days when sex was thought of as a duty. Today, sex has entered the mainstream consciousness and is becoming a normal part of culture and media. Increasingly, medical and commercial advances are finding ways to make sex better and to resolve sexual problems for people.

Sex serves a fundamental purpose in holding the fabric of society together – it is not only for reproduction, but also encompasses people's emotional and social behaviours, and our relationships with each other.

Now, there is another argument for the benefits of sex – the health argument. We may have already had some idea that sex is good for our physical, mental and emotional health, but there is more scientific evidence to back this up now.



Studies have shown that semen can act as an antidepressant. – Courtesy of Schering AG

## **Good for stress**

Studies have shown that semen can act as an antidepressant. In a study of college students in New York, it was found that women in the study who had sex without condoms showed fewer signs of depression than women who used condoms or abstained from sex.

However, this is in no way meant to encourage women and men to have unprotected sex, unless they are married or in a long-term monogamous relationship. Otherwise, unprotected sex with many different partners will cause more damage to the health through the risk of sexually transmitted diseases.

Semen aside, however, the release from orgasm is also believed to be a calming factor that can help reduce stress and promote better sleep.

There is also reason to believe that women will benefit more from physical intimacy and sex with a partner, compared to achieving orgasm without a partner.

It also has a cyclical effect – sex will lead to less stress and a better mood, which will then lead to more sex.

### **Good for pain**

Orgasm is a natural and powerful painkiller because it induces the body to release a hormone called oxytocin, as well as endorphines, before and during orgasm. These natural chemicals reduce anxiety and fear, as well as suppress pain signals from the brain.

A study has shown that when women experience orgasm, their thresholds for tolerating and detecting pain increased significantly by 74.6% and 106.7%, respectively. This is good news for women who often suffer from headaches, PMS or arthritis pain.

In relation to pain, sex is also believed to help wounds heal faster, due to the role of oxytocin in regenerating certain cells.

### **Good for the heart**

When it comes to sex and the heart, people always think that sex is more likely to cause heart attacks, especially in older men.

This is a bit of an urban legend because it very rarely happens and is not purely caused by sex. In fact, research shows that sex helps to lower blood pressure and may even protect against stroke because of its ability to reduce stress levels.

Men's cardiovascular health can also benefit from sex, as shown in a British study in men which concluded that frequent sexual intercourse may offer some protection from fatal heart attacks.

Like any other form of physical activity, sex also burns calories. 30 minutes of sex burns 85 calories or more. It may not sound like much, but think of it as a bonus for an enjoyable activity, and a good reason to increase the frequency and duration of intercourse!

## **Good for the prostate**

Here's another benefit for men: protection from prostate cancer. The more that men ejaculate, the lower the risk of prostate cancer.

A big epidemiological study of 30,000 men in the US found that men who ejaculate between 13 and 20 times a month had a 14% lower risk of prostate cancer than men who ejaculated on average, between four and seven times a month for most of their adult life. The risk is decreased even more among men who ejaculated upwards of 21 times a month.

## **Good for staying young**

Sex is no magic potion for immortality, but if it can lead to all the benefits above, then it will probably go a long way in improving your overall physical and mental health, and helping to prevent premature ageing as well as debilitating chronic diseases.

And if you're having good sex in a stable, happy relationship, then the benefits are immeasurable.

Above all, the healthiest type of sex is safe, protected sex, especially if you are not in a long-term monogamous relationship.

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