

Erection, Orgasm Woes May Require Frank Talk

DEAR DR. SCANTLING:

I am a 23-year-old male. I am writing you because I have performance anxiety because of what happens to me when I'm in the bedroom. I do not believe I have a physical problem with my penis, because I get erections when I masturbate, but I'm always worried about what will happen when I'm in the position to have intercourse and whether things will go right.



DR. SANDRA SCANTLING
INTIMACY, SEX
& RELATIONSHIP

Recently I've noticed that my penis seems to get hard enough during sex, but it's not the way it used to be. My mind gets "stuck" thinking about it and worrying about it. My girlfriend, Alicia, is 22 and she's a very sweet person. I like her a lot, but I'm not sure she's going to be the one for me. We've been dating on and off for about two years. The other night we started fooling around in the living room. She touched me and I felt the blood running into my penis and thought, "this would work right now." But Alicia would never have sex right there on the sofa — she's too shy. She'll only do it in the bedroom, in the dark, because she's uncomfortable about her body — but she has a nice body. By the time we went upstairs, and she got ready, I just couldn't get any erection! Alicia

became very upset and started to cry because she thought it was her "fault" and said I was "impotent." I felt terrible. I had to reassure her that it wasn't her fault — while trying to get back into the mood! I also felt a little annoyed.

I've never failed at anything else. I'm good at sports, successful at my job and have a lot of great friends. Girls say I'm pretty good-looking. I'm just losing my confidence and feel like avoiding sex with her completely. I like Alicia, but I think I'm her first sex partner. I don't want to hurt her or upset her, but I don't feel comfortable talking with her about this embarrassing subject. I'm thinking about this all of the time and can't get my mind to stop. Do you think I need psychological help?

— TROY, HARTFORD

DEAR TROY:

If you don't feel comfortable talking to Alicia about your feelings, you shouldn't be having sex with her. Both of you sound like you're worried about your sexual performance, and you're probably hoping that things will just get better on their own, but this is rarely the case.

Women often assume that they are to blame when their partner has an erectile problem, that they're not attractive enough or that they're doing something wrong. In the same way, being called "impotent" can certainly affect a male's sexual confidence and self esteem. Getting erect on command is a

totally unrealistic expectation. Erections naturally come and go — you're not a failure. Men are not machines. And women aren't always "ready" for sexual closeness just because the erection has "arrived." This is Alicia's first sexual experience, and you say that you're not sure she's the one for you. You both have some thinking (and talking) to do if you want this relationship to work in and out of the bedroom. And, in the meantime, I hope you're using birth control and protection against sexually transmitted infections!

To get back to you, Troy, you say you have erections during masturbation, so I agree that your problem is probably not physical. When you say that you're "thinking about this all of the time and can't get your mind to stop" — you may have an obsessive problem or some other condition that should be evaluated by a mental health professional. There are a number of medical and psychological approaches that can help you manage your anxiety.

About Alicia, however, if you want a more intimate sexually satisfying relationship with her, both of you need to honestly address your personal insecurities and feelings about each other — as painful as that may be. Alicia also needs support with her concerns. We don't die from embarrassment or from sharing the truth. Admitting your problems will probably lift a load of

tension off both of your shoulders.

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HI DR. SCANTLING,

I am a 41-year old woman and have been married for 18 years. I have never had an orgasm and wonder if there is something physically wrong with me. I feel so alone! Do you provide therapy? Do you have any suggestions on any books or materials? Do you recommend "faking it"? I've heard that there some orgasms are considered the "right kind" of orgasm. Is this true?

Thanks for any guidance or suggestions.

— BETH ANN, SOUTHTON

DEAR BETH:

You are certainly not alone. Difficulty or inability to reach orgasm after sufficient sexual stimulation and arousal is a very common problem for women, men, and couples. And yes; I see women (and men) with a wide range of sexual concerns. There is also a national website that offers the names of certified sex therapists at www.AASECT.org.

I start by taking a comprehensive history, offering information and education about your body and sexual sense appreciation, and evaluating your current relationship. Some women are surprised to learn that they have been having orgasms right along, but didn't know it because they were expecting some enormous seismic event! Orgasms can vary a great deal. Some are delightfully delicate — like a sneeze or

flutter — barely perceptible. Others are full-bodied contractions. Some are stimulated by genital touching, penetration, breast touching or occur in your dreams just by imagery alone.

But I never recommend faking it! I sometimes encourage women to deepen their reactions to see if they can "jump start" their response, but when you actually fake orgasm you're fooling yourself and your partner.

There are many videos and books available on the subject. The "Becoming Orgasmic" series by Dr. Julia Heiman or Dr. Lonnie Barbach's "For Yourself" are classics and a good place to begin.

There is definitely no one, best orgasm. If you're comfortable pleasuring yourself, I suggest you discover what kind of touch feels best to you when you're alone. Stay connected to what you like, let go of any obligation or achievement-focused pressure and enjoy what happens!

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