

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN BODY – Self-Learning vs. Masturbation

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## KEY POINTS:

- **Understanding our bodies** – We have bodies and it's our responsibility to understand them.
  - **Differences between men and women** – Men generally understand their bodies and how they function sexually more so than women; men and women have different primary challenges with sex.
  - **Working through negative conditioning** – Deeply ingrained; may induce anxiety, be uncomfortable or awkward.
  - **How much learning is needed?** – Extent of woman's need to develop further knowledge depends on ...
  - **Why is it important to understand our bodies?** Necessary to understand that sexual response in both men and women is facilitated by familiarity with and appropriate stimulation of the sexual organs.
  - **Benefits of self-learning** – If couples haven't been able to figure it out together.
  - **Key Differences – Self-Learning vs. Masturbation** – Understanding the difference between self-learning vs. masturbation.
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## Understanding Our Bodies

It is a woman's responsibility to understand her own body, for it is critical to sexual fulfillment within marriage. One of the primary reasons we come to earth is to gain a body. I would suggest that God has given us permission to seek understanding about how our body functions, and its incredible potential for experiencing pleasure and joy. If a woman is unfamiliar with her own anatomy and sexual functioning, or has not yet been able to experience orgasm, she may need to give herself permission to learn about her body.

## Differences Between Men and Women

Men handle and see their genitals every time they go to the bathroom. They generally understand their bodies and how they function sexually. Women often, however, do not have the same understanding. Many have never really seen their genitals. One woman explained that the only time she had ever used a mirror to see her genitals was more than 20 years ago, the first time she had used a tampon. It makes sense for a woman to know about her body as much as or more than a doctor or a woman's husband.

Remember, the primary sexual challenge for women is to awaken and free their sexuality, whereas for men, the main challenge is to control and contain their sexuality. Much of the counsel given regarding sex and sexuality is directed primarily to men to control their feelings and is often the wrong approach for women. Unfortunately, women dutifully digest these teachings—resulting in significant sexual difficulties within God's appointed, even commanded, sexual relationship of marriage. There is room for sexual self-learning even amidst the wise counsel to avoid masturbation.

Having never experienced an orgasm during her 14 years of marriage, Rhonda consulted her doctor. He wanted to rule out a physical basis for the lack of orgasm, so he sent her home with the

counsel to find out if her body was physiologically capable of an orgasm. She was a bit resistant to this advice, but the need to figure out what was wrong, for the sake of her marriage alleviated some of her feelings of embarrassment. With a little self-learning, she finally realized that her body was capable of an orgasm. Now that she knew what those powerful sensations felt like, she and her husband could work together to recreate them during lovemaking.

### **Working Through Negative Conditioning**

Women do not need to go to medical school to have a legitimate reason to learn about and understand the functioning of their own bodies. Initiating self-learning about one's body may be awkward or uncomfortable for many women. Where there is strong resistance there is likely to be deep negative conditioning and inhibitions regarding sexual learning. Some women may find it difficult to overcome deeply ingrained shame or embarrassment about the body, sexuality, and misunderstanding about the differences between self-learning and masturbation. These things make it difficult to understand what is acceptable to God for worthy purposes. To deal with and overcome existing feelings of shame, guilt, or embarrassment, in order to learn about the body and their God-given sexuality, some women may need to think again about the sanctity of sex in marriage (see Chapter 2). They can also ask God to help them know what is right.

### **How Much Learning is Needed?**

The extent of a woman's need to develop further knowledge of her body and its sexual functioning will depend on her prior knowledge, her comfort level with sexuality, and her sexual relationship in marriage. The best environment for such learning is with a supportive and sensitive spouse. Couples can benefit as they discuss with each other the needs of their own relationship and how best to facilitate such learning.

### **Why is it Important to Understand Our Bodies?**

It is necessary to understand that sexual response in both men and women is facilitated by familiarity with and appropriate stimulation of the sexual organs. Though some may have concerns about any form of self-stimulation, Christian physician, Ed Wheat, provided some helpful insights about the appropriateness and value of temporary self-stimulation for learning purposes. He stated:

*I believe that self-stimulation by the wife, in which the husband is also involved, may play a very important part in helping a woman who has had a difficult time reaching a climax. Through this she may learn how to respond, experience orgasm, and establish correct response patterns. . . . The wife who temporarily stimulates herself as a part of lovemaking between the two (for learning purposes only) is not so much just pleasuring herself as learning to have a response that will also greatly please her husband.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Benefits of Self-Learning**

The reason women do not experience orgasm is most often because of a lack of clitoral stimulation. Generally, this is the husband's responsibility to provide this stimulation. This is where many couples encounter a problem, because the wife often doesn't know what she wants or needs, so how can she teach her husband? So that a couple's sexual fulfillment does not flounder on the rocks of ignorance or inhibition, a woman must take the initiative to find out what is sexually arousing to her and help her husband provide it.

While relationship issues can be a cause of sexual dysfunction, it may also be that too few women have sufficient or specific sexual understanding of their bodies and its functioning to create sexual fulfillment. Many women come into marriage not knowing where the clitoris is, for example, or what it is for. How can a wife teach her husband something she knows little about herself? Some say couples will figure it out on their own. Some do, but what of the many, like the woman above,

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<sup>1</sup> Wheat and Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure*, 240.

who do not—even after 14 years of marriage? Sexual ignorance in marriage is not bliss. It is likely to cause significant sexual and relationship difficulties.

Self-learning may be beneficial not only for the sexual understanding that is gained, but also because it can be therapeutic psychologically to face the fears and negativity surrounding sex and the body. Sometimes you just have to find the courage to look under the bed to see there is no monster. Self-learning can represent a significant step toward unlocking sexual inhibition.

Ideally, young brides-to-be are lovingly given specific counsel from their mothers immediately prior to marriage regarding their bodies and their sexual functioning. Within marriage couples are also to learn and discuss these things together. For various reasons one or both of these circumstances may not occur. Self-learning with or without the spouse present may be necessary to gain understanding of the body in order to achieve the honorable and worthy goal of complete sexual fulfillment in marriage.

### Key Differences – Self-Learning vs. Masturbation

While some women may be more comfortable learning about their sexual organs and functioning alone, others may prefer to have their husband present. To help alleviate some of the concerns regarding the appropriateness of sexual self-learning, I have compiled a list of ways self-learning differs from the inappropriate self-stimulation of masturbation.

SELF-LEARNING	MASTURBATION
The <u>intent</u> of <b>Self-learning</b> is to gain a <u>healthy understanding</u> of the body's functioning.	The intent of <b>masturbation</b> is to selfishly gain pleasure and sexual gratification.
<b>Self-learning</b> is for <u>short-term purposes</u> .	<b>Masturbation</b> can become an ongoing habit or addiction.
<b>Self-learning</b> is meant to further (or improve) the expression of love between a woman and her husband. It shows a healthy understanding of the <u>godliness of the body</u> expressed as a desire to learn how to experience the pleasure God intended between husband and wife.	<b>Masturbation</b> is meant as an act of lust to further the selfish gratification of an individual.
<b>Self-learning</b> is a <u>conscious choice</u> to <u>improve sexual intimacy</u> in marriage.	<b>Masturbation</b> occurs on impulse with the intent to self-medicate or self-satisfy.
<b>Self-learning</b> <u>intent</u> is to <u>improve</u> the couple's relationship.	<b>Masturbation</b> weakens or replaces the marital relationship, causing individuals to seek sexual satisfaction alone.
<b>Self-learning</b> can have the wonderful result of <u>mutual sexual fulfillment</u> in marriage.	<b>Masturbation</b> causes distortions regarding love and sexuality, and results in a "loss of confidence," "lessened control of sexual impulses" and "loss of the Spirit."