



10 Surprising Health Benefits of Sex

The perks of sex extend well beyond the bedroom.

By Kara Mayer Robinson

FROM THE WEBMD ARCHIVES 

Sex not only feels good. It can also be good for you. Here's what a healthy sex life can do for you.

1. Helps Keep Your Immune System Humming

"Sexually active people take fewer sick days," says Yvonne K. Fulbright, PhD a sexual health expert.

People who have sex have higher levels of what defends your body against germs, viruses, and other intruders. Researchers at Wilkes University in Pennsylvania found that college students who had sex once or twice a week had higher levels of the a certain antibody compared to students who had sex less often.

You should still do all the other things that make your immune system happy, such as:

- Eat right.
- Stay active.
- Get enough sleep.
- Keep up with your vaccinations.
- Use a condom if you don't know both of your STD statuses.

2. Boosts Your Libido

Longing for a more lively sex life? "Having sex will make sex better and will improve your libido," says Lauren Streicher, MD. She is an assistant clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

For women, having sex ups vaginal lubrication, blood flow, and elasticity, she says,

all of which make sex feel better and help you crave more of it.

3. Improves Women's Bladder Control

A strong pelvic floor is important for avoiding incontinence, something that will affect about 30% of women at some point in their lives.

Good sex is like a workout for your pelvic floor muscles. When you have an orgasm, it causes contractions in those muscles, which strengthens them.

4. Lowers Your Blood Pressure

Research suggests a link between sex and lower blood pressure, says Joseph J. Pinzone, MD. He is CEO and medical director of Amai Wellness.

“There have been many studies,” he says. “One landmark study found that sexual intercourse specifically (not masturbation) lowered systolic blood pressure.” That’s the first number on your blood pressure test.

5. Counts as Exercise

“Sex is a really great form of exercise,” Pinzone says. It won’t replace the treadmill, but it counts for something.

Sex uses about five calories per minute, four more calories than watching TV. It gives you a one-two punch: It bumps up your heart rate and uses various muscles.

So get busy! You may even want to clear your schedule to make time for it on a regular basis. “Like with exercise, consistency helps maximize the benefits,” Pinzone says.

6. Lowers Heart Attack Risk

A good sex life is good for your heart. Besides being a great way to raise your heart rate, sex helps keep your estrogen and testosterone levels in balance.

“When either one of those is low you begin to get lots of problems, like osteoporosis and even heart disease,” Pinzone says.

Having sex more often may help. During one study, men who had sex at least twice a week were half as likely to die of heart disease as men who had sex rarely.

7. Lessens Pain

Before you reach for an aspirin, try for an orgasm.

“Orgasm can block pain,” says Barry R. Komisaruk, PhD, a distinguished service professor at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. It releases a hormone that helps raise your pain threshold.

Stimulation without orgasm can also do the trick. “We’ve found that vaginal stimulation can block chronic back and leg pain, and many women have told us that genital self-stimulation can reduce menstrual cramps, arthritic pain, and in some cases even headache,” Komisaruk says.

8. May Make Prostate Cancer Less Likely

Going for the gusto may help ward off prostate cancer.

Men who ejaculated frequently (at least 21 times a month) were less likely to get prostate cancer during one study, which was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

You don’t need a partner to reap this benefit: Sexual intercourse, nocturnal emission, and masturbation were all part of the equation.

It’s not clear that sex was the only reason that mattered in that study. Lots of factors affect cancer risk. But more sex won’t hurt.

9. Improves Sleep

You may nod off more quickly after sex, and for good reason.

“After orgasm, the hormone prolactin is released, which is responsible for the feelings of relaxation and sleepiness” after sex, says Sheenie Ambardar, MD. She is a psychiatrist in West Hollywood, Calif.

10. Eases Stress

Being close to your partner can soothe stress and anxiety.

Ambardar says touching and hugging can release your body’s natural “feel-good hormone.” Sexual arousal releases a brain chemical that revs up your brain’s pleasure and reward system.

Sex and intimacy can boost your self-esteem and happiness, too, Ambardar says. It’s not only a prescription for a healthy life, but a happy one.

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