



BRIEFING PAPER: Pleasure and Sexual Health

What has pleasure got to do with sexual health?

Sexual health: Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled [1]

Pleasure: "An emotional experience that many regard as fundamentally undefinable ... pleasure by virtue of its undefinability, may simply be a fundamental emotional experience characterisable as a desire to have the stimulation that produced it repeated" [2]. However complicated it may be to define pleasure most will agree that sexual pleasure "A good feeling that people get when they have sex with someone else or are physically close to another person" [3] that they care about

Pleasure and Sexual Health: We devote time to work and making money. We devote time to the routines that maintain our everyday life. And we devote time to recreational activities, to sports, to movies and to our hobbies. But most of us devote too little time to the enrichment of our erotic life and thus do not honor our sexual selves adequately...our ideas about sexual pleasure tend to be too focused on genital stimulation and orgasmic release. Often, other sensual experiences are under-emphasized, treated merely as "foreplay," a prelude to the "real events." The individuals who are happiest with their sexuality, especially as they grow and age, are those who adopt a different attitude. Remember that sexual pleasure is as much mental as physical and the sensuality of your body extends to every part of you [4]

Sexual Pleasure and Safer Sex: In our minds, sexual pleasure and safer sex may seem unconnected but in the real sense, since pleasure touches every part of our being - physical, mental and psychological – one can surmise that pleasure and safety are inextricably linked. If one is engaged in risky or unsafe behaviours, then one is unlikely to experience pleasure in its optimal dimensions. A fulfilling sexual relationship is not dependent on frequency or specific sexual behaviors. Instead it's reliant on whether the sexual experience makes both you and your partner feel good **without compromising either person's health** [5 emphasis added]. Your health and respect for your partners' rights and health are key issues to consider in addition to what gives you pleasure. So it is not always all about YOU; as the popular slogan goes. That is why rape and other forms of sexual abuse are unacceptable. They may give one person pleasure but what happens to the other person involved? Hey did you know that abstinence could be pleasurable too? Yes, abstinence can also be pleasurable. Abstinence is the most effective birth control method and STI prevention strategy...It is commonly accepted as 100% effective, if practiced consistently. Only you can determine whether abstinence is a desirable and realistic choice for you [6].

Enhancing Physical Health and Pleasure the Kegel Way : Dr. Kegel initially conceptualized these exercises for women after childbirth. Women with urinary incontinence are asked to practice Kegel's exercises regularly to increase bladder control. In addition Kegel exercises strengthen the inner walls of the vagina and increase the blood flow to the genital area thereby increasing the pleasure of intercourse for men and women. The underlying principle of Kegel exercises is to identify the pelvic muscles. These muscles are attached to the pelvic bone and act like a hammock that holds the pelvic organs. A woman is required to tighten and relax the pelvic muscle over and over again. Tightening and releasing those muscles is what Kegel exercises is all about. A common problem is identifying the right muscles. Most people end up contracting the abdominal or thigh muscles and the pelvic floor muscles don't get worked upon at all. In fact the incorrect contractions may worsen pelvic floor tone. You can take the guidance of a nurse or doctor to teach you the correct technique [6]. For 'how to' information, you may visit : <http://www.wdxcyber.com/kegel.htm>

Aphrodisiacs and Pleasure: Named after Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love and beauty, aphrodisiacs include food, drink, scents, herbs, chemical products, and other devices that increase the human libido. [You could include Viagra on this list if you like...] According to the tens of thousands of love potion peddlers, aphrodisiacs are the perfect way to achieve successful results of human lustful desires. There are hundreds of things revered for their aphrodisiac qualities, charms, and sexual arousal. Here are some examples: chillies, curries, chocolate, frog legs, monkey brains, tomatoes, goat's eyes, cucumbers, alcohol, aphrodisiac teas, Pepsi, perfumes and colognes containing musk or chemical hormones, ginseng, adrenaline, Viagra, aphrodisiac roll-ons etc. [7] if you know of others and their effects from your cultures and traditions, just drop us a line at info@arsrc.org. Certainly, pleasurable abstinence is your choice, then by all indications, aphrodisiacs are off-limits!

Resources

1. http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual_health.html
2. Reber S. Author and Emily Reber *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (2001) London: Penguin, p. 544
3. http://www.iwannaknow.org/glossary/r_z.html
4. Barnaby B. Barrat, *Enhancing Your Sexual Pleasures*, Midwest Institute of Sexology, <http://www.mwsexual.com/readingroom/articles/sexual-pleasures.htm>
5. Sexual health: An interview with a Mayo Clinic specialist <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sexual-health/HQ01363>
6. <http://www.healthcenter.vt.edu/pdf/abstinence.pdf>
7. <http://www.targetwoman.com/articles/kegel-exercises.html>
8. http://www.allsands.com/Health/Alternative/whatareaphrodi_wxn_gn.htm

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