

# Self-Exploration

*It can be empowering and fun to get to know your body...*

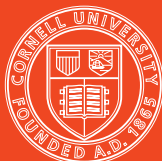
**Good news! The body you have was perfectly designed to give and receive pleasure.** Furthermore, you are entitled to experience all the pleasure your body can provide. This doesn't mean that learning to relax and enjoy your body will always come naturally. Some people find it takes practice to let go of judgement or anxiety and to simply relax and enjoy sensation. This may be especially true if you have experienced body shaming or trauma. However, the more you can devote protected time alone to self-exploration, the easier and more natural it will become.

You may have had the experience of viewing your body naked. But have you spent time exploring your body fully with your eyes closed? If not, find some private time alone to do so. Try lying down, closing your eyes, and mapping in your mind the topography of your own body from head to toe. Notice the rounds, flats, and divots, the furriness, roughness, and smoothness. Try not to judge or evaluate what you feel. Just experience your body.

Sexually-charged (or at least "higher energy") "erogenous zones" are located all over our bodies. Your skin is highly sensitive to touch. The most obvious examples of these are the genitals and chest/breasts. However, some people feel gently aroused when their cheeks, lips, or temples are stroked. Gliding a hand over the inner thighs can be highly pleasurable for some and not for others. The same is true for your knees, feet, butt, arms, and other areas.

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Notice as you explore which areas of your body enjoy touch today and which do not. Experiment... As you explore the length of your body, consider varying pressures, speeds, and techniques (massaging, rubbing, fingertip tapping, patting with an open-hand, etc.). See what happens when you add massage oil or lotion or by adding warmth or cold. Try increasing or decreasing your rate and depth of breathing. Notice how even slight alterations affect your experience of touch. Ask yourself, “what would feel best to my body in this moment?”

As you explore your body and tune in to the pleasure of touch, you may notice your genitals responding. If you have a penis, it may become erect. Similarly, a vulva may become swollen or engorged and a vagina may become “wet” (lubricated). Such physiological responses are automatic (like increasing heart rate or blood pressure) and may or may not correlate with actual sexual desire. It’s okay to simply notice.

That said, feel free to include your genitals as part of your exploration. They’re yours! Whether or not orgasm is desired, learning how your genitals like to be touched is helpful information. Try the same variations in touch, pressure, speed, etc. that you used elsewhere on your body. Try stimulation with one hand and then two. What feels good today?

You may find your clitoris or the head of your penis welcome concentrated touch; you may also feel it’s “too much.” Every body is unique. And even the same body may respond differently to touch on different days. Factors such as sleep, diet, use of alcohol or other drugs, and level of stress can all impact the way bodies responds to touch. The point is not for you to figure out some magical formula for orgasm, but rather for you to develop an ongoing and loving relationship with your own body—one in which you learn to fully-experience pleasurable touch.

If issues or concerns regularly interrupt your self-exploration, you can talk with your Primary Care Provider (PCP) to consider/rule out any medical causes and get connected with appropriate resources (e.g., specialty counseling). PCP appointments are medical visits can be scheduled online at *myCornellHealth* and by calling 607-255-5155.

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