



Sexual Self-Care:

Owning your Power for a more Pleasurable Life

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Q1: Why do people need self-care? (Psychoeducation)

A1:

- So by this time, most of us know why self-care is important: to combat stress and its effects.
- About eight in 10 Americans say they frequently (44%) or sometimes (35%) encounter stress in their daily lives, with biggest stressors being children and work (Saad, 2017).
- On top of that, burnout, or the state of emotional, depersonalization, and decreased sense of accomplishment caused by excessive and prolonged stress (Freudenberger, 1975) is at an all time high with 21% of workers in older generations claiming they feel frequent or constant burnout at work and nearly 7/10 millennial workers say they sometimes feel burned out at work (Pendell, 2018)
- Stress has been linked to various health concerns including: Heart disease, Asthma, Obesity, Diabetes, Headaches, Depression, anxiety, Gastrointestinal problems, Alzheimer's disease, Accelerated aging, and even premature death (Griffin, 2015).
- Completing the stress cycle and implementing some self-care are ways to develop healthy coping skills for stress. Self-care is important to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself, produce positive feelings, and boost your confidence and self-esteem to know that you can handle future stressful situations. Also, self-care is necessary to remind yourself and others that you and your needs are important.

Q2: What is sexual self-care? (A definition)

A2:

- Simply put, self care is taking care of your whole self. There's all sorts of self-care, and I know Beth touched on some of those before, like mental, physical, emotional, personal, social, spiritual, etc. but sexual self-care is unique in that it can combine a number of those aspects. Sex can be personal or social, it can be physical, emotional, and spiritual all at once. By focusing on the sexual aspect of self-care, we are reminding ourselves that sex is a basic human function (for most) and having a healthy relationship to our bodies and our sexual selves is part of what makes us whole.

Q3: How does one utilize sexual self-care when they consider themselves A-sexual?

A3:

- I say “for most” because there are people who identify as asexual. In fact current studies suggest 1% but the number could be much higher (Poston & Baumle, 2010). But sexual self-care can be for asexuals too. People who identify as asexual can still be romantically attracted to other people, masturbate, and enjoy sexually intimacy with others, while not being sexually attracted to anyone (Prause & Graham, 2007). It's important here to conceptualize sex as more than just PIVing (or penis-in-vagina), it's about the connection to your erotic self, communication, relating to another person, and so much more.

Q4: But why sexual self care? What are the benefits? (Psychoeducation)

A4:

- Sexual self-care allows you to understand your body and your potential for pleasure, moving beyond body (and genital) shame
- Allows you to reconnect to your body and a sense of pleasure beyond trauma and changes such as unwanted sex, the sexual body in pregnancy, in birth, and postpartum, and the sexual body during and after illness. Its a way to heal and embrace one's body & sexuality again after traumatic experiences
- It allows to discover our own way to sexual empowerment, beyond lack of sex education, social constraints, or instances where you may have felt that you did not have control or power over your own sexual expression.
- Focusing on sexual self care can also be a form of transformative justice, or “pleasure activism,” ie. using the work of using satisfaction and enjoyment to reclaim ourselves from the impacts of oppression and promote socio political reform to move toward large-scale societal healing (Brown, 2019).
- Reconnecting with your sexual self (through sex, masturbation, and orgasms) releases feel-good hormones like oxytocin, and endorphins, our natural pain-killing hormones (Toates, 2009).

Q5: How does one utilize sexual self-care when they are experiencing anhedonia?

A5:

- So anhedonia refers to a lack of pleasure, usually seen as a side effect of depression and other mental health disorders; however, it can also be the result of other causes, such as overwork, recent tragedies, and you guessed it, stress! For those experiencing anhedonia, I would advise first seeking out a professional to rule out any medical causes, followed by following up with a mental health provider to address possible depression or undiagnosed mental health concerns. For those experiencing anhedonia to to life stressors, sexual self care can be a way to take care of yourself and develop healthy coping skills for future stress. But for those who are too stressed to even think about sex, please stay tuned for my next podcast where will be tackling just that.

Q10: Is porn helpful or hurtful in relation to sexual self-care?

A10: So I am not anti-porn. I think though, that everything to be enjoyed should be enjoyed in moderation. So if someone is wondering about their porn use, I suggest that they ask themselves if and how it is impacting their life. Porn can be helpful for a lot of reasons, it can help you explore interests, it can be a shared activity between partners, and it can teach you new techniques, but if its getting in the way of your work day or your relationship, it might be time to close the laptop. With regards to self-care, it's important to remember that porn isn't real. I like to think of porn being to sex what fast and the furious is to driving, its faster, more extreme, the explosions are bigger (everything is bigger), and those people are actors. If you're going to watch porn, remember to have compassion for yourself, mainstream porn tends to limit the types of people and body types we see, but there are other not-so-mainstream porn companies that strive for more realism.

Q11: When is the earliest someone should learn about sexual self-care?

A11: The sex start stuff starts from the beginning, as long as its developmentally appropriate. For example, getting to know your body parts and boundaries is especially important at a young age. Children who are shamed about their genitals often become adults who are ashamed of their genitals. There's a group called Sex Positive Families that has loads of resources for giving your kid "the talk" at various age levels. I'll link them for folx to check out if interested.

Q12: Is mindfulness apart of sexual self-care?

A12: Mindfulness is most certainly a part of sexual self-care. It means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present, without judgment. I can't think of a better way to come to know your authentic self as a sexual and erotic being.

Recommended Readings/Resources:

Nagoski, E., & Nagoski, A. (2019). *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*. Ballantine Books.

Nagoski, E. (2015). *Come as you are: The surprising new science that will transform your sex life*. Simon and Schuster.

<https://sexpositivefamilies.com/>

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