

QUICKIES: sexual anatomy and pleasure a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Sexual anatomy is about far more than genitals. The parts of the body where we can explore and experience our sexuality and pleasure are potentially *all* the parts of the body.

Here are some of the body parts most often involved when people explore sexuality and seek pleasure.

The brain: The largest, most important and most active sexual organ of the body isn't a penis or vagina. It's the brain!

Sexuality is about the body, but it's just as much about thoughts and feelings. Even in the ways it is physical, we feel those sensations through our central nervous system. That's all brain stuff. Without a brain, we couldn't experience sexuality or pleasure. The brain also releases hormones that influence how sex feels, and all of our body parts are communicating with the brain during sex. The brain is also primarily responsible for orgasm and is where orgasm actually happens.

Erogenous zones: Erogenous zone is a term used to describe a part of the body that usually feels extra sensitive, mostly because it's got a lot of sensory nerve endings. This can include the lips, tongue, palms and fingers, the bottoms of the feet, the inner thighs, nipples, neck, ears, armpits and the genitals.

The perianal region (the butt): The anus is the opening (to the rectum, inside the body) that's visible between your buttocks. It and the rectum can be sites of sexual pleasure for people of any gender or sexual orientation. Then there's the prostate, a walnut-sized gland in the body that's located below the bladder. If you were born with a penis, you were probably born with a prostate. The prostate is very sensitive to pressure and touch, and can be pleasurable to have stimulated.

The pudendal nerve is also located in this area, at the bottom of the spine. A lot of the feelings people have in their genitals during orgasm and other parts of sexual response are because of the pudendal nerve talking to the brain.

The pubococcygeus muscle (which some people might call PC or Kegel muscles) is also in this area. It stretches from the pubic bone to the tail bone, and supports the pelvic organs. It usually contracts during orgasm.

The perineal sponge is also in this region for people born with a vulva. It's internal to the body, between the bottom of the vaginal opening and the rectum. It's part of the clitoral system, and is made of nerve endings, erectile tissue and blood vessels. A person might feel sensations of this sponge from stimulation to the vagina, clitoris or anus or the areas around them.

The penis: Any and all parts of the penis may be enjoyable – or not! -- when touched during sex or masturbation. The head of the penis usually has a higher number of sensory nerves than the shaft. If a person with a penis has a foreskin, that can also be a source of pleasure because it is also full of sensory nerve endings. The testes and scrotum also have many sensory nerve endings, and people can find sexual enjoyment through stimulation of their scrotum or testicles.

The clitoris: The clitoris is very similar to the penis. It is the only part of the body, though, whose only known purpose is pleasure. The clitoral shaft on the outside of the body — above the urinary opening within the vulva — is what most people call the whole clitoris, but that's only one part of a much larger system that has parts both inside and outside the body. The crura, the corpus carvenosum, the urethral sponge and the vestibular bulbs, all on the inside of the body, are also parts of the clitoris that can provide pleasure.

The vagina: The vagina is inside your body. On one end is the vulva, the part where you can put things in. On the other the end, inside the body, is the cervix (the opening to the uterus). The majority of nerve endings in the vagina are in the first third of it. You may have heard people talk about the “G-spot” inside the vagina. The G-spot is basically part of the internal clitoris and is within that first 1/3rd of the vagina. Touching that area can be pleasurable. The back 2/3rds of the vagina aren't very sensitive. This is one reason why people with vaginas usually won't reach orgasm or experience a lot of pleasure from vaginal intercourse alone.

The labia and mons: The mons, the part of the vulva where most of the pubic hair is, has sensory nerve endings. The labia — the parts that look like lips or folds of skin — are also very sensitive. Because of how everything fits closely together in the genitals, touching these body parts can also stimulate the parts of the clitoris.

Not everyone's genitals or other body parts behave the same way and not everyone likes the same things or feels a given thing or area of the body in the same way.

What feels good to one person during sex or masturbation can, and often will, change over time, and also won't always feel the same way with one partner as it does with another. What feels good also varies from person to person. That's one reason why it's important for partners to talk to each other about what feels good during sex. We each experience sex in a very unique way, even though we all have the same or very similar body parts and systems.