

How To Have Sex

In 2023

For an act as old as humanity itself, sex has never been so complicated. According to the headlines, Gen Z are doing less of it, while middle-aged divorcees are embracing hook-up culture, and sexual fluidity is challenging heteronormative monogamy. Feeling lost? Never fear. **Men's Health** asked 1,000 Brits to dish the dirt on their private lives, to uncover what we're doing in the bedroom, what we want to be doing and the shape of things to come. Call it bedtime reading



01/

High Frequency

Men report having sex more frequently than women: 45% of men say they have sex multiple times a week, compared with 35% of women. Those having the most sex? Unmarried men in relationships.



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If it seems like things have got a little... wilder in recent years,

there might be some truth to that. Recent research by dating app Bumble found that more than 40% of its users would describe their approach to sex and intimacy as 'open and exploratory' – a trend reflected in our own survey.

Across all demographics, more than a quarter of British men tell us they've had sex with more than one person at once, while 17% have attended a sex club or other group sexual experience – and a further 28% are open to an invite.

Labels mean less than they once did, too. Among straight-identifying men, almost one in 10 have had a romantic or sexual encounter with another man, or with someone whose identity is non-binary or genderqueer; that rises to one in five among men aged 25 to 34.

Across the UK, over a third of men (37%) are unpartnered, rising to more than half of men under the age of 35. Most of you (70%) now view 'sexual wellness' as of equal importance to your physical and mental health. And almost half of you would consider non-monogamy.

'Intimate relationships are evolving,' says James Eve, a psychosexual and relationships therapist. 'While many of the same anxieties remain – around intimacy, infidelity, sexual difficulties and finding, keeping or leaving a partner – marriage and 2.4 children is no longer viewed as the only viable option.'

One of the obvious factors that has influenced our expectations around sex is technology. The wide variety of dating apps has opened up new opportunities for those in search of casual encounters.

But the game is changing for couples, too. Experts believe the pandemic has altered the way we consider gender roles, as lockdowns enforced a period of self-reflection. Silva Neves, a psychosexual and relationship psychotherapist, says he has seen more men start to question 'masculinity messages' – specifically, the social pressure to project success.

While striving to excel professionally, he says, some men realised they'd missed out on time with their families, and had deprioritised the roles of romance and pleasure in their lives. Some quit the

corporate grind in search of a better work-life balance. 'Others decided to step into different types of sexual and romantic relationships that don't follow strict societal norms,' Neves says.

Monthly active users of Feeld – an app marketed to the sexually curious – grew by 250% between 2021 and 2022. Around that time, there was a 242% increase in people looking for consensual non-monogamous relationships. Now, as the cost-of-living crisis makes it harder for couples to separate, many predict that 'creative' relationship structures could become more common. That might include pairing up to start a family, but continuing to pursue new partners.

Of course, even in this more open-minded environment, satisfaction is not guaranteed. According to our research, only half of men feel that their sex lives fully reflect their desires and personal preferences. But that's not to say you're an unhappy lot. Our survey shows that 65% of British men feel content with their sex lives, including 51% of single men, 71% of those who are married or in a civil partnership and 81% of unmarried men in relationships. Still, insecurities remain: when we asked if you thought other people were having better sex than you, almost half of you (47%) said yes.

'In some senses, the [sexual] landscape remains consistent. Namely one that is self-conscious, concerned with questions such as, "Am I normal?", and wanting to feel competent and confident, sexually,' says therapist Eve.

Comparison is part of the human design, he says. 'We often project that other people are happier, more successful, or have it sussed... We need to normalise that our feelings about sex are subject to fluctuation and change.'

The purpose of this survey is not to fuel that urge to compare, nor merely to sate your curiosity about what your peers are getting up to between the sheets (though it may well do). Our research shows that there is no 'normal' when it comes to having sex in 2023. Whether you're lonely, horny, lost or nonplussed, you'll see yourself reflected on these pages. Let's take it to the bedroom.



This Is How We Do It

Our nationally representative survey of 1,000 people provides a window into Britain's bedrooms. Here's the hard data:

02/ He/He/They

A fifth of straight-identifying men aged 25 to 34 have had a romantic or sexual encounter with another man, or with someone non-binary or genderqueer.



*INCLUDING THOSE DIVORCED OR WIDOWED

03/ Solo Act

While just 12% of single[†] men declared 'no interest' in dating, 32% of single women said the same. Similarly, a higher number of unpartnered men are 'actively trying' to meet someone.



04/ Happy Days

A fifth of you say you are 'very satisfied' with your sex lives. Factors such as age and sexual orientation appear to have little impact. But men with partners are more content than those with bachelor status.



Pillow Talk



Guilty Pleasures

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most men consume porn (70%) – although women watch it, too (33%). But our feelings are complex: almost half of men who watch porn experience guilt about their habits, with rates highest among men aged 18 to 24. Why? As therapist and clinical sexologist Ness Cooper points out, while our culture teaches men that watching porn is normal, it also reinforces ideas about what sort of porn men should like; namely, heteronormative.

'Men can feel guilty if they're aroused by erotic acts that don't fit traditional gender expectations,' she says. 'The idea of being "found out" can trigger guilt, particularly if you anticipate judgement from a partner.' Not only is it normal to enjoy both porn and sex (and sometimes the two together), Cooper emphasises that our fantasies with regards to the former don't always need to translate to the latter. Of course, there are murkier, moral concerns for the modern man. An estimated 88.2% of porn features physical aggression against women. Content subscription services such as OnlyFans give creators greater autonomy – and simplify payment structures – but the manufactured closeness between the performer and consumer can sometimes distort our expectations of what sex is like in the real world.

Erika Lust, one of the foremost ethical adult-film directors, suggests a question-before-clicking approach. 'Are consumers asking where their porn comes from, as they would with their food? And are they willing to pay for it?' Look to erikalust.com, frolicme.com or makelovenotporn.tv for provenance-assured pornography.

15%

The percentage of men who turn to their friends for guidance on sex-related issues, versus 20% of women



Safety First

While one in five of you insist that you're diligent about STI testing – rising to 27% among gay, bisexual and pansexual men – 21% of single men admit they should get tested more often than they do. So, what's sensible? Vikas Mehta, a general medicine doctor at Mayo Clinic Healthcare, suggests that anyone having condomless sex should get checked every three months. This doesn't just apply to the young guns: with the rise of dating apps, a report by the Local Government Association found there was a 20% jump in the number of over-65s being diagnosed with common STIs in England between 2017 and 2019, with men more likely to be affected. Discussing sexual health with a new partner might not be great pillow talk, but it's an important chat to have.

For heterosexual couples, the same is true of birth control. Rising awareness of issues, such as abortion rights, have prompted new conversations, and Dr Mehta suggests that these decisions should be made collaboratively, rather than delegated to the female partner. 'We know there are potential side effects of hormonal contraception, many of which can affect a relationship on a day-to-day basis,' he says. 'It's good for men to approach these conversations with knowledge and information on the range of options available for both partners.'



Breaking Free

While many surveys suggest today's young people are having less sex than the generations that came before them, it's also true that Gen Z has introduced a new vocabulary around desire and gender expression. Census data suggests they're more than twice as likely to identify with a sexual orientation other than 'straight', while in England and Wales, there are roughly 262,000 non-binary or transgender people – which may sound like a lot, but that's still a small minority. Anecdotally, Dedeker Winston, a relationship coach and co-host of the *Multiamory* podcast, says she sees fewer non-binary people who were assigned male at birth feeling accepted

and understood compared with those assigned female at birth. Similarly, men exploring bisexuality or pansexuality might end up facing greater stigma. 'The consequences are still high for those who are defying traditional masculine archetypes,' she says. For those who are still coming to terms with their sexual self-expression, inclusive sex clubs might be a good place to start. 'Thanks to the internet and more people being out and proud on social media, these events have enjoyed a renaissance in the past few years,' says Winston. 'What's great is that we're seeing the emergence of play parties that appeal to a variety of interests, identities and sexualities.'

05/ State Of Affairs



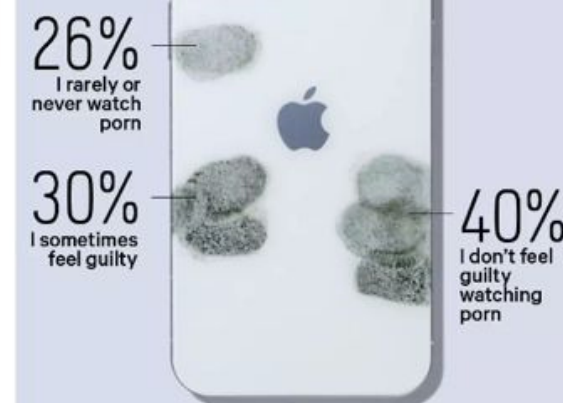
While 42% of men believe it is possible for a relationship to fully recover from sexual infidelity, fewer than a quarter of women agree. Notably, men under 35 are the most optimistic.

06/ Climactic Scenes

Almost two in five men surveyed told us they orgasm 'every time' with their partner(s). However, a much smaller percentage of women could say the same.



07/ Screen Time



While most of you told us you watch porn, not all of you feel great about it. Our research suggests modern men's relationship with X-rated content is... let's just say, complicated.



Going It Alone

One of the more striking imbalances revealed by our survey was in the attitudes to dating among heterosexual singles. While almost half of women without partners told us they were 'open to meeting someone', men were considerably more likely to be actively seeking a romantic or sexual partner – and were less likely to have written off a relationship. Irrespective of age, our results showed that women are more comfortable with a solo status.

Therapist Eve believes this is likely to be influenced by the greater ease with which women form strong interpersonal bonds. There's less requirement to pursue romance if your needs for closeness, connection and kinship are met by friends and family, he says. Progress towards equal pay and financial independence are other important factors at play.

The good news for the unwillingly uncoupled is that a post-Covid wave of break-ups has given the singles pool a top-up. Plus, dating apps aren't obligatory: contrary to popular belief, most couples meet offline. YouGov data shows that nearly a fifth of Brits met their current or most recent partner at work (tread carefully...), while 18% met through mutual friends and 5% through a shared hobby.

08/ Toys Story

Four in 10 men use sex toys – including 43% of men aged 55 to 64 – while a further fifth of men have never tried using them but are toy-curious.



62%

A little under two thirds of men feel comfortable asking for the kind of sex they want



The Orgasm Gap

■ A happy 72% of men say they orgasm all or most of the time when having sex with a partner of any gender. However, only 51% of women report the same, with 15% of women answering 'rarely' or 'never'. Sexologist Madalaine Munro points to the damage done by on-screen sex scenes, which has skewed men's perception of the ease with which women can climax. 'Men often ask me for specific techniques to make a woman orgasm, but the truth is that the more comfortable a woman feels, the more likely she is to orgasm,' she says. 'Scientifically, a woman needs to feel safe in order for her nervous system to change to a parasympathetic state.'

Munro advises mid-act check-ins, such as asking, 'How could this be better for you?' This invites specific suggestions – move higher, go slower, etc – and is more useful than asking, 'Is this okay?', to which the polite default response is usually, 'Umm, yeah'. Sometimes, however, your partner might not know exactly what's missing – and that's fine, too. In this case, a supportive contribution is, 'I'm here to listen' or 'There is nowhere we need to get to, I just love being with you.' 'These might sound like simple phrases,' says Munro. 'But they can be life-changing for a woman who is struggling to experience the pleasure she really wants.' Still want a little guidance? Online platforms such as omgyes.com offer instructive, unintimidating videos made by women.



The Low-Down

■ Meeting a partner might ease dating angst, but intimacy isn't without its insecurities. When quizzed about the biggest barriers obstructing men from a more gratifying sex life, 13% named low body confidence as a problem. 'Difficulty performing' is an obstacle for 11% of men, while lack of time or energy were also factors. Only 29% said they had no barriers to a happy sex life.

What goes on up top often finds its way down: urologist Peter Stahl, who works with health e-tailer Hims, refers to psychogenic (or psychological) erectile dysfunction (ED). 'It's more common and age-agnostic than many think,' he says. A 2022 study* of 3,000 Brits found that 59% had experienced an issue such as ED, low libido or premature ejaculation.

'In some cases, anxiety will disappear

as you become more familiar or comfortable with a sexual partner,' says Dr Stahl. If problems persist, he recommends cognitive behavioural therapy to disrupt negative thinking patterns, or speaking to your GP for advice – and potentially taking a medication called PDE-5 inhibitors, which are used to counteract the effects of stress hormones.

While our cultural openness around sticky health topics is generally improving, the majority of social media 'sexfluencers' are women; sexual wellness content aimed at men tends to be medical rather than congenial. Straight men are also less likely to talk to their straight male friends about the ins and outs of their sex lives, particularly when it comes to expressing uncertainty or vulnerability.

09/

Group Project

More than a quarter of men have had sex with more than one person at once, while a further third of men who haven't tried it would be open to it.



11%
of women have had group sex

26%
of men have had group sex

*SOURCE: HIMS & HEHS

37%

Google is men's go-to for sex tips. Almost two in five name search engines as their key source of information

10/ Taking Control

When asked whether they'd consider taking a male-specific contraceptive pill, if one was made available, almost half of men said yes. However, only a quarter of women say that they would trust a male partner to take it.



11/ Opening Up

Almost one in 10 men we surveyed had been in a consensual and non-monogamous relationship, rising to 14% of men aged 25 to 34.

49%
It's not for me

9%
I've tried it

36%
I'd be open to it

Pillow Talk



Three's Company

■ Perhaps most surprising about the stats on open relationships is not the number of people who've tried it, but the number who reported that they're open to it – 55% of men in the 35-to-44 age bracket wouldn't rule it out. Women are less certain about the idea, with almost three quarters giving it a hard 'no'. (Those aged 25 to 34 were most open to the experience.)

Relationship coach Winston believes this branching away from traditional structures comes down to two factors: 'a decade of visibility of queer relationships' since the legalisation of gay marriage in the UK, which has broadened minds with regards to what family can look like; and 'young people questioning whether dominant structures are really working, such as mental healthcare, corporate behaviours and now relationships'.

Intrigued? Pause before you leap. 'I often find that men, especially straight men, are excited by the idea of non-monogamy until they realise, "Oh wait, my partners can also date other people?" Straight men might also have to work harder to find partners, because many women are suspicious of a man who wants to date multiple women.' Somewhat counterintuitively, however, research suggests women may be more likely to initiate a change in the rules of engagement, as female desire is thought to wane more considerably in long-term relationships.

The key to success is communication. 'When you're colouring outside the lines, you can't make assumptions,' says Winston. 'So, you need to be able to communicate about uncomfortable feelings, such as jealousy or loneliness.'

Our expectations around fidelity are currently shifting, too. Popular psychologists such as Esther Perel have subverted the idea that affairs are 'the ultimate betrayal' by unpacking the complex desires and anxieties that drive people to cheat, and offering new frameworks for understanding our romantic relationships. 🗨