

Debunked: America's most pervasive sex myths

Did you know that of the 39 US states that mandate some form of sex education, [only 17 require this sex education to be medically accurate](#)? Or that only 20 states require information about contraception to be taught, whereas 29 states require that children be taught abstinence?

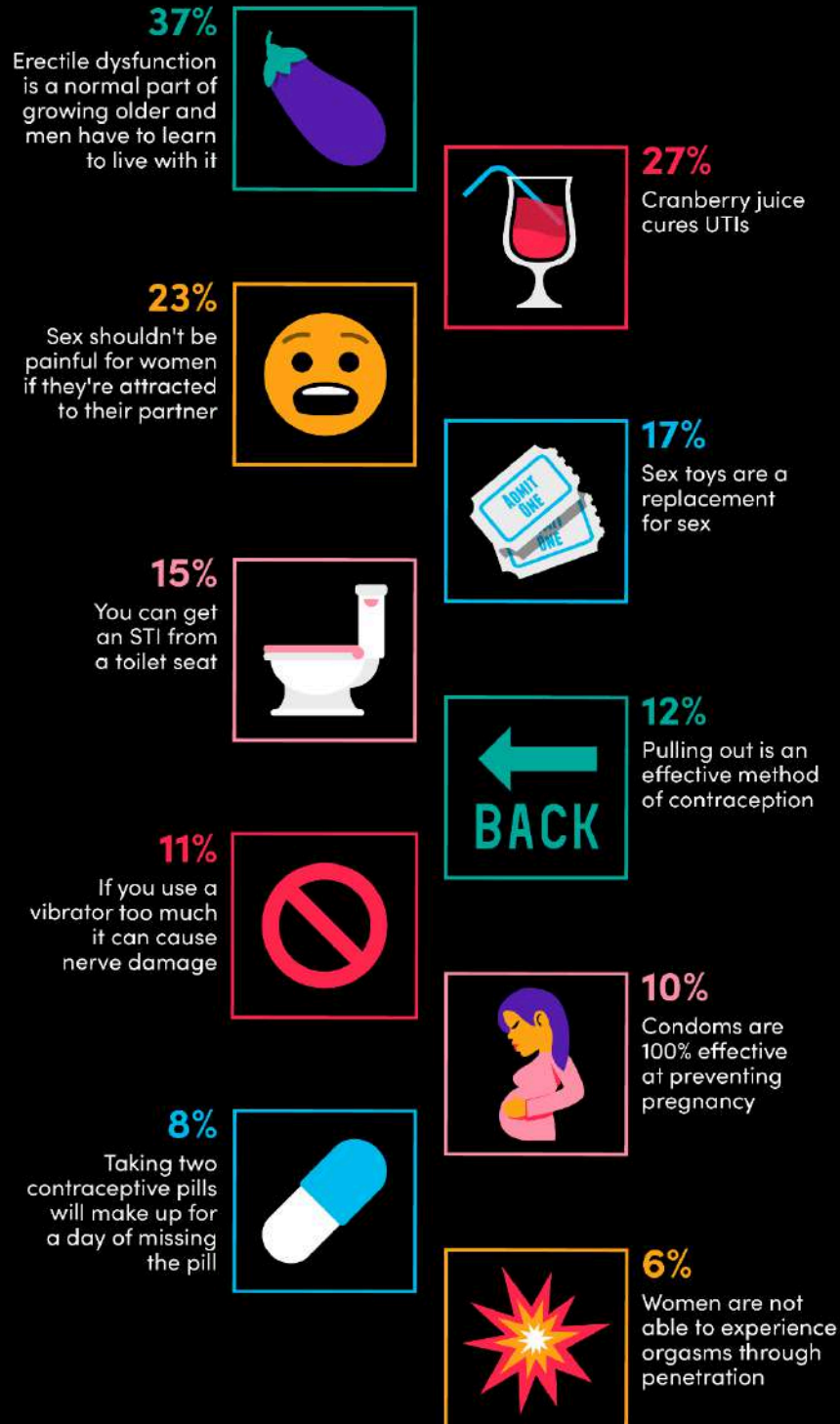
Rules around how sex education should be taught vary considerably from state to state, and the majority of schools are seriously lacking when it comes to teaching students about sexual health and wellness. In fact, when we asked Americans where their sexual health information came from, only 12% said they learned it from school.

It's no surprise, then, that many young people now turn to platforms such as TikTok and Reddit to answer their questions about sex. Although social media sites can be helpful when seeking advice, they're not the most trustworthy of sources — and can potentially lead to a dangerous spread of misinformation.

To find out just how clued-up Americans are about sex, we asked over 2,000 adults in the United States whether they believed a range of common myths surrounding sexual health and pleasure, with some very interesting results.

Debunking America's most widely believed sex myths

The Most Common Sex Myths in the US



1. 'Erectile dysfunction is a normal part of growing older and men have to learn to live with it'

Believed by 37% of Americans

According to our survey, the most widely believed sex myth in America is that erectile dysfunction — the inability to experience or maintain an erection — is a normal part of growing older, with over a third of surveyed adults believing this to be true. This was a particularly common belief among men (42%) and people aged over 55 years old (51%).

According to certified sex educator [Javay Frye-Nekrasova](#), erectile dysfunction is actually a very individual problem. *“There are definitely things you can do to minimize the chances of having erectile dysfunction, but no one can say for sure whether it’s inevitable or not. Every body is different, and the different practices and activities that people engage in can prevent or increase the chances of it.”*

“It’s important not to do things that can hurt your penis, such as wearing a cock ring too long, using stimulants that react negatively with your body, or pushing your penis and erections past their limits.”

2. 'Cranberry juice cures UTIs'

Believed by 27% of Americans

Ever started chugging cranberry juice at the first sign of a UTI in the hopes of getting rid of it? You’re not alone. More than 1 in 4 people we surveyed believed this method to work, making it the second most common myth overall.

[Javay Frye-Nekrasova](#) comments, *“If you talk to frequent UTI-havers they may say that cranberry juice is their saving grace, but if you were to talk to a doctor they would say drinking water and urinating when you feel you have to go is your best defense against UTIs.”*

Drinking enough water and urinating frequently are definitely both effective ways to reduce your risk of contracting a UTI. Making sure to pee after sex is another top tip — although according to our survey, 61% of Americans believe this to also be a myth.

“This is not a myth. Everyone should be urinating after sex, and this is all types of sex – partnered sex, masturbation, using sex toys. Engaging in sexual activity can introduce bacteria and germs into the urethra that can lead to a UTI, so peeing after sex can clear anything out that may have made its way into the urinary tract.”

Sometimes, you may still develop a UTI despite taking precautions. If you do,

cranberry juice probably isn't the best cure. *"Again, everyone's body is unique, so if you feel that cranberry juice has been working for you that's great. But if you do feel like you have persistent UTIs, definitely seek medical help from a doctor."*

3. 'Sex shouldn't be painful for women if they're attracted to their partner'

Believed by 23% of Americans

The third most commonly held misconception among Americans — and second most common among men specifically — is that sex shouldn't be painful for women if they're attracted to their partner.

Despite 1 in 5 American adults believing this statement, it's a definite myth that attraction will always eliminate any pain during sex. Although finding your partner attractive may lead to increased arousal, and therefore better vaginal lubrication, this won't necessarily solve the problem. People with vaginas may find sex uncomfortable no matter how aroused they are, depending on the cause of the pain.

Adding more lubricant or changing up positions may help to relieve pain, but if sex continues to be painful it's always best to speak to a medical professional to find out if there's an underlying problem such as vaginismus.

4. 'Sex toys are a replacement for sex'

Believed by 17% of Americans

The miseducation surrounding sex toys seems to be particularly pervasive. Our survey reveals that 17% of adults are under the impression that sex toys function as a replacement for sex, when in reality they can be a fantastic addition to your sex life — not a replacement for it.

11% of respondents to our survey also believe that using a vibrator too much can cause nerve damage, with 18-24 year olds (24%) particularly susceptible to this misconception. Even more concerningly, 6% of men believe that sex toys 'ruin women for sex without them', which is definitely not the case.

Bringing sex toys into the bedroom is a very personal decision, but it's one that can offer many potential benefits for people of all genders.

5. 'You can get an STI from a toilet seat'

Believed by 15% of Americans

Most sexually active adults are wary of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and rightly so. Taking precautions to avoid STIs is always sensible — but it's also

important to understand how they're spread.

Unfortunately, many of us are still confused about how exactly STIs are transmitted. 15% of those we surveyed believe that it's possible to contract an STI from a toilet seat, which is actually not possible at all. STIs are spread through sexual intercourse and bodily fluid contact, and they don't survive long enough outside of the body to be transmittable via something like a toilet seat.

Taking precautions when using public toilets is always a good idea due to their less than ideal hygiene conditions, but you definitely don't need to worry about catching an STI from one.

Contraception misconceptions

Given that [only 20 US states require information about contraception to be taught](#) as part of students' sex education, it's not surprising that some of us seem to be confused about how contraception works.

Our survey revealed that 1 out of 10 women believe that taking two contraceptive pills will make up for a day of missing the pill, when in reality it depends on the type of pill you take and where you're at in your cycle. The pill is only ever 99% effective, and this effectiveness may further decrease if you miss a dose.

Meanwhile, 15% of men believe that pulling out is an effective method of contraception (compared to 10% of women and 13% of non-binary people), and 5% of men are also under the impression that they can only get a woman pregnant if she orgasms.

Both of these myths are completely false; whether or not a woman orgasms has no impact on her chances of getting pregnant, and pulling out as a method of contraception is extremely risky and not recommended.

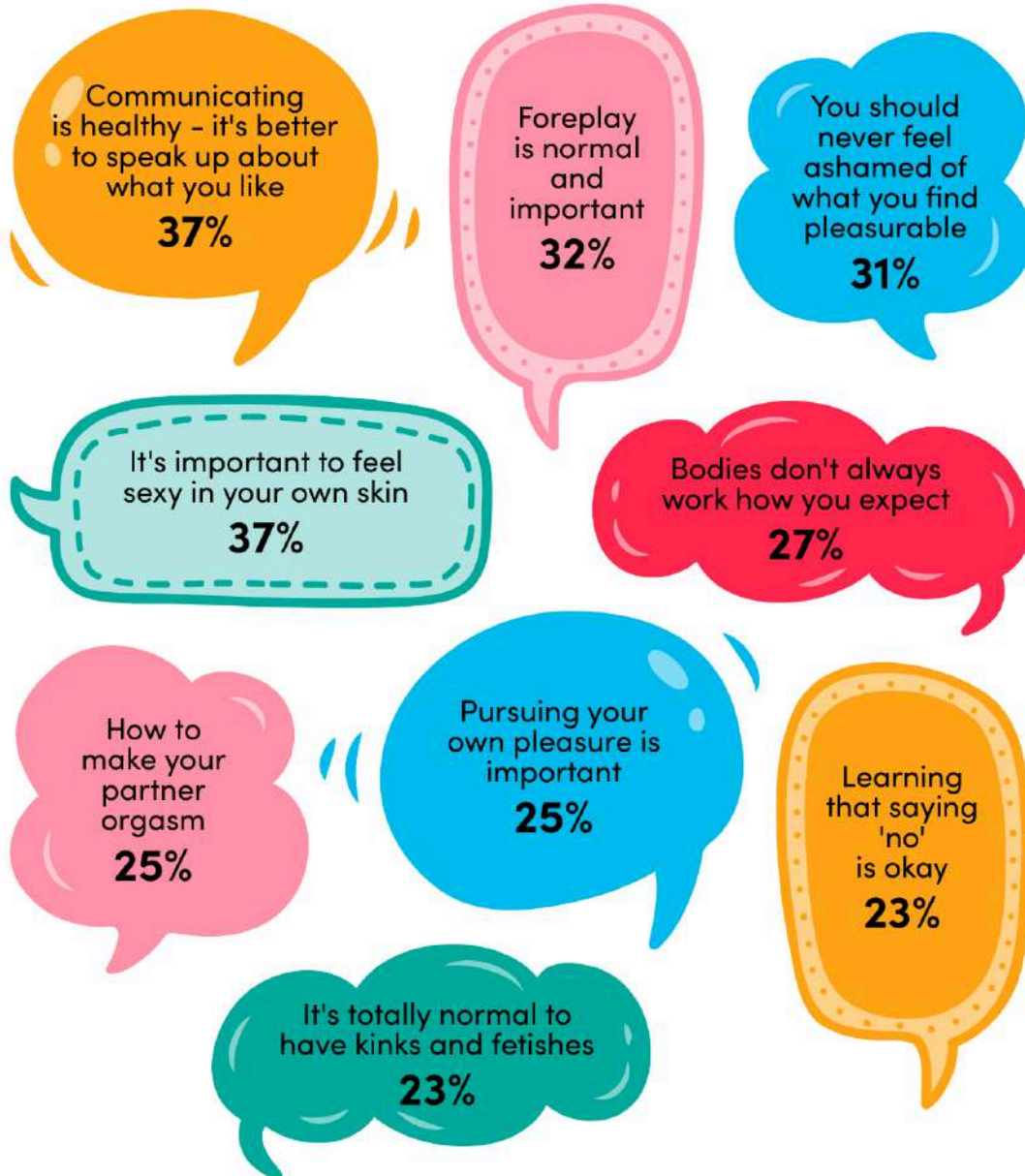
What do we wish we'd learned sooner about sex?

So now we've established how much Americans generally know about sex, we then moved on to ask what they wish they had learned sooner about sex. The most popular answer among American adults overall (36%) was that they wish they had been taught the importance of communicating earlier on.

Healthy communication is integral to every kind of relationship, including those of a sexual nature. While the majority of adults probably come to learn this as we grow older, it seems many of us wish that we'd learned to speak up about what we do or

don't like at a younger age.

What do you **wish** you'd known about sex **sooner**?



For women, their second most common wish was that they had learned the

importance of feeling sexy in their own skin (36%). For men, on the other hand, the second most popular response was that they wish the importance of foreplay had been taught to them sooner (34%). Men also wish they had learned earlier on how to make their partner orgasm; 34% of men selected this, compared to just 18% of women and 26% of non-binary people.

The number one answer among non-binary people was ‘bodies don't always work how you expect, whether in terms of arousal or sexual function’, with 74% voting for this as something they wish they had learned sooner. Non-binary people are likely to have a different relationship with their bodies than cisgender people, which may explain why they feel particularly strongly when it comes to being educated about diverse sexual experiences and bodily functions.

Why is correct and quality sexual health and wellness knowledge important?

According to certified sex educator [Javay Frye-Nekrasova](#), good sexual health and wellness knowledge is important for a variety of reasons. *“It ensures that people are engaging in relationships, activities, and experiences that they fully understand and can positively and enthusiastically consent to, and have confidence in their decision. It also ensures that people understand all the variances within the human body to better understand and accept everyone in the world.”*

Javay also emphasizes the importance of a well-rounded sexual education in maximizing pleasure. *“It ensures pleasure for everyone and the freedom to define pleasure for themselves, not as society says pleasure should be.”*

What are the best resources to find sexual health and wellness information?

Javay suggests certified sex educators such as herself as a good source of information. *“You can find some via governing bodies like AASECT, or if you already follow a sex educator, ask them for more recommendations or see which other educators they follow or share content from.”*

She also highlights the importance of choosing reliable sources, commenting, *“You can also make sure you’re going to credible sources such as Planned Parenthood, the CDC, or the World Health Organization. There are also a lot of books that are available by credible sex educators and other professionals. You can check the reviews or research the author to find out if they’re credible.”*

Methodology:

The data used was from a survey we conducted in August 2022 of 2,008 US residents over the age of 18.

Expert commentary was provided by:

[Javay Frye-Nekrasova](#), Certified Sex Educator