

Meta title: What counts as sex? | Lovehoney UK

Meta description: With Lovehoney's latest survey revealing over half of Brits don't think fingering or using sex toys count as sex, they've done some digging into what sex actually is

H1: What counts as sex?

Sex is a pretty hot topic in society. We talk about it just as much as (if not more than) we actually do it, swapping stories of steamy encounters and sharing advice for spicing things up in the bedroom. You'd think, then, that we could all agree on what sex actually *is*.

Unfortunately not. There's a lot of confusion about what actually counts as sex – like, is it really sex if no clothes came off? Can we really call it sex if we only used our hands to get each other off?

We recently surveyed over 2,000 Brits to find out what they think. While 85% agreed that penetration counts as sex, only 60% said the same about oral – meaning two in five think that going down on someone isn't really sex. On top of that, half (50%) of people think that [anal](#) doesn't count, over half (54%) think the same about fingering, and 61% believe using sex toys on someone else doesn't count either.

So, what *does* count? Let's find out.

H2: Oral, fingering and hand jobs: Are they really sex?

Going down on someone, fingering them and giving a hand job are all considered sexual activities, so the short answer is: yes, they count as sex.

You can have a healthy and fulfilling sex life, even if all you ever do is use your hands or mouth to get your partner off. In fact, a lot of people with vulvas get most of their sexual pleasure from acts like oral that stimulate the clitoris, so it's totally normal to want to do this often – and it still definitely counts as sex.

It's also still possible to catch sexually transmitted infections from things like oral sex, so make sure to test regularly, and use protection like a dental dam to stay safe.

H2: Does using sex toys count as having sex?

Despite a huge 61% of Brits believing otherwise, using [sex toys](#) with a partner can definitely be considered as having sex. (The clue is in the name, right?)

Just like engaging in other sexual activities, using sex toys involves intimate exploration, pleasure, and connection with a partner. Whether you're using a [vibrator](#), a [dildo](#), or any other type of toy, it's an active and intentional act of sexual engagement.

Sex toys can add a whole new dimension to your sexual experiences, providing some super intense sensations and letting you explore new kinds of pleasure. And since sex is all about feeling good, using toys is a 100% valid way to do that.

H2: Does masturbation count as sex?

This one is a little trickier, because the answer is technically no. Although masturbation is a form of sexual activity, it's usually very much a solo activity – which means it doesn't actually count as sex.

That being said, just because it isn't the same thing as having sex doesn't mean it can't be equally (or more) pleasurable. Whether it's just you and your hand or you get some toys involved, masturbating is a great way to get comfortable with your own body and figure out what gets you off.

Some people find they actually orgasm way more frequently while masturbating than they do with a partner, while others find it hard to get aroused alone. Both of these are completely normal, so no need to stress either way.

H2: Is it still sex if you don't orgasm?

Yes! If you're engaging in sexual activity with another person but don't manage to orgasm, it absolutely still counts as sex.

Although we tend to think of orgasms as the end goal of having sex, that can put a lot of unnecessary pressure on us that actually makes the experience less enjoyable overall. It's fairly common to have trouble reaching climax with a partner, particularly if you have a vulva – so don't worry if this is the case for you. Some people find they get even more satisfaction from edging too, so either way, just try to relax and enjoy the experience without wondering when the big O will arrive.

H2: Sex is more than just penetration

The bottom line is: sex is a deeply personal thing, and there's no one-size-fits-all definition of what exactly counts as sex.

However, it's important to realise that it's so much more than just penetration – which is what society often tells us is 'real sex'. While penetration can be super fun, this narrow concept of sex ignores a whole load of equally fun and pleasurable activities.

“Penetration isn’t always as enjoyable for people with vulvas, as research shows that most can’t orgasm by penetration alone and need clit stimulation to get all the way,” says Elisabeth Neumann, Head of User Research at Lovehoney. “Plus, limiting sex to just penetration also devalues a whole range of queer experiences – even though research shows that queer women orgasm more often, and are overall more satisfied with their sex lives than heterosexual women.”

Ultimately, the key to a fulfilling sex life is open communication, consent, and a willingness to explore and discover. It's about prioritising pleasure, understanding our own bodies, and being attentive to our partners' needs and desires.

As long as everyone involved is consenting and enjoying themselves, there's no right or wrong way to have sex!