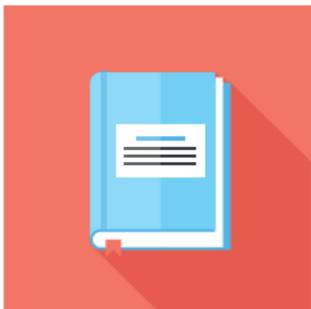
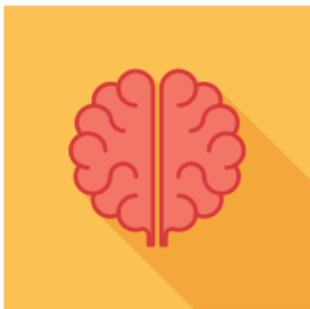


# YOUR BRAIN...



A  
SEX  
ORGAN?



CONSIDER WHAT THE  
THREE-POUND BRAIN  
HAS TO DO WITH YOUR SEX LIFE



Medical Institute  
for Sexual Health

# WE CANNOT SEPARATE THE BRAIN FROM THE BODY



- What we think in our brains has an impact on our bodies and how we use them.<sup>1</sup>
- Likewise, what we do with our bodies has an impact on our brain.<sup>1</sup>

Participation in any type of sexual activity- including oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex, masturbation or viewing pornography- causes the brain to:

- Release chemicals such as dopamine, oxytocin, and vasopressin.<sup>2</sup>
- Form physical associations and synaptic connections that bridge gaps between neurons within the brain.<sup>3</sup>

Synaptic connections in the brain become stronger and more numerous the more a behavior is repeated.<sup>4</sup> Brain patterns that are formed from sexual activity may cause us to act and to respond unconsciously in certain ways. But the good news is that we can change these patterns by changing our behavior!<sup>5</sup>



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# BRAIN CHEMICALS

## DOPAMINE

Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, is responsible for that intensely good feeling that we experience when we do something exhilarating.<sup>6</sup> It gives us the desire or the need to repeat the behavior that caused us such a good sensation. Dopamine sends the reward signal for behaviors that are good for us, but also for behaviors that are dangerous for us. Dopamine is a chemical highly associated with addictions of all kinds, including sexual addictions<sup>7</sup> and pornography use.<sup>8</sup>

## OXYTOCIN & VASOPRESSIN

These chemicals are associated with bonding. Bonding is important for family formation. Oxytocin and vasopressin are released regardless of who the sexual partner is.<sup>9</sup> That means that bonding can occur with a sexual partner regardless of whether they have a one-night stand or a long-term relationships. It may also explain why people often stay in abusive relationships- because they have bonded sexually with their abuser.

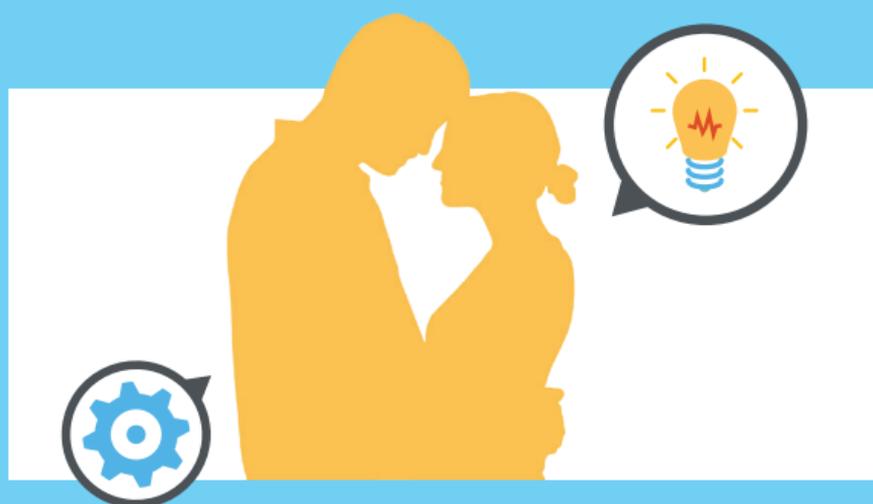




# BRAIN MOLDING

Our brains are very complex organs.<sup>10</sup> They are composed of billions of neurons that are connected by synapses.<sup>11</sup> Some synapses strengthen with repeated use, while others deteriorate if they are not used.<sup>12</sup> Our brains are “molded” by our thoughts and actions and influenced by brain chemicals that contribute to making us who we are. Thus, the physical make-up of our brain changes with the choices that we make, including sexual choices.<sup>13</sup>

The brain plays a significant role in the bonding that occurs with someone during each sexual encounter. This can help bond lifelong partners.



## CASUAL SEX & BRAIN MOLDING

When a person participates in a lifestyle of hooking-up, then breaking up, then hooking-up again, the brain may mold this behavior into a pattern to follow. Later, when an individual desires to form a long-term monogamous relationship, the brain may undermine their ability to form a long-lasting bond.



# RELATIONSHIP TYPE MATTERS

## SHORT-TERM RELATIONSHIPS:

The riskiest sexual situations by far are short-term sexual relationships which may result in an increasing number of sexual partners without permanent commitment.

- Even with the use of birth control and condoms, the risks for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections remain high.<sup>14</sup>
- Approximately 1 in 4 teen girls will get pregnant by age 20.<sup>15</sup> Young people 15-24 years old acquire nearly half of all new sexually transmitted infections.<sup>16</sup>
- A 2013 study showed that sexual activity with a non-romantic partner was significantly associated with depression.<sup>17</sup>

## COHABITATION:

Studies show that cohabitation (living together before marriage) makes it more likely that couples will break up and more likely that they will divorce if they do marry.<sup>18</sup>

Research shows that couples who view cohabitation as a substitute for marriage are the least likely to be married five years later.<sup>19</sup>

## MARRIAGE:

Marriage is a lifelong, faithful commitment between two people. Marriage has been shown to foster better romantic and parental relationships.<sup>20</sup> Individuals who wait to have sex within a marriage have more stability and success in their lives as measured by education, economics, and emotional stability.<sup>21</sup>



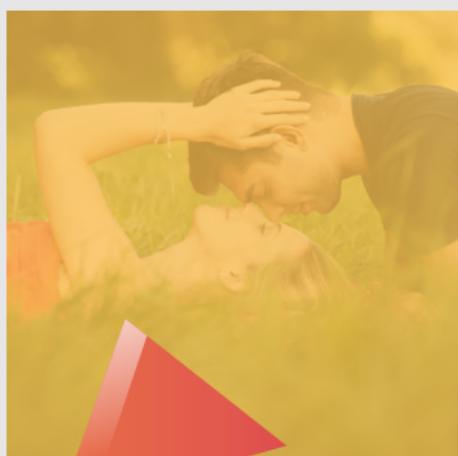


# AGE & BRAIN MATURITY

Many people are unaware that the brain is not fully developed until a person reaches their mid-twenties.<sup>22</sup> The pre-frontal cortex is responsible for decision-making and other important functions, such as setting priorities, organizing ideas, controlling impulses, and recognizing future consequences of behavior.<sup>23</sup> The pre-frontal cortex continues to develop until a person is about 25.<sup>24</sup> Before the brain fully matures, emotions, rather than rational thinking, tend to rule our lives.<sup>25</sup>

Young adults do not need to feel like they must make tough decisions all by themselves. It's important to have a trusted advisor to help with big decisions.

**OUR BRAIN INFLUENCES  
OUR BEHAVIOR**



**AND OUR BEHAVIOR  
INFLUENCES OUR BRAIN**

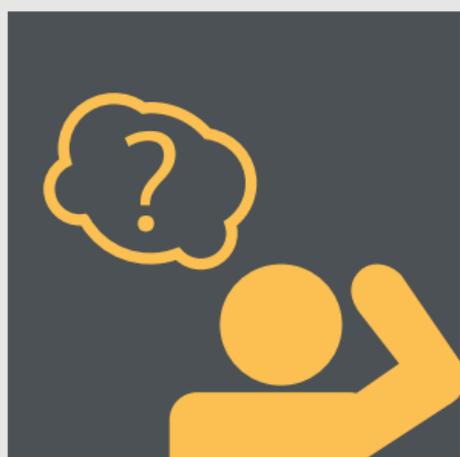


# NOW THAT YOU KNOW

There is an age-old saying: “When you know better, you do better!” No one can change what has happened in the past. Instead, each person must look to the future and decide how the rest of their story will unfold. The good news is that the brain remains “moldable” throughout our lives. With effort you can change your sexual behavior patterns. Here are few suggestions:

- Find a good friend with the same commitment about sex, shared values, plans and dreams.
- Write down your commitment to wait for sex along with motivational quotes or thoughts as reminders.
- Practice assertiveness based on your rights to your health, future, well-being and how you expect to be treated.
- Make sure your values are known to anyone you date or grow close with: Make your views clear to lay the foundation for a rewarding relationship.
- Don't get involved with someone who doesn't share your values: talk about your plans and expectations for the future.
- Plan your dates to avoid difficult situations: choose public over private places to keep the focus of the relationship where it should be.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs: impaired judgment makes tough decisions more difficult.
- Introduce your date to your parents: it will communicate a great deal about what you value.
- Limit the amount of physical contact: Set boundaries early.

***Your future is worth the wait!***





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