



Can't get enough? Great excuse. Say you have *hyperaesthesia* – a condition of hyper sensitivity to certain stimulus.

Why won't he stop looking at my chest? Probably a case of *apodyopsis* – the erotic fantasy of mentally undressing someone.

Don't say masturbation. Say *autoeroticism* – the act of sexually arousing yourself.

...er pondered if you're gay? You could be *homoromantic*. It's possible to be romantically attracted to your own sex but sexually

A place to

Not-so-secret garden: A new night where women can find out more about, ahem, down below in supportive surroundings. HELEN CROYDON joins the gathering

I sit in a circle of 15 other nervous but smiling women of all ages and backgrounds in the basement of the Sh! Women's Erotic Emporium in Hoxton – a female-only sex shop. 'My lady garden is having a dry spell but I'm hoping it will pick up in the spring,' says a 28-year-old account manager and we all roar with laughter. 'My lady garden is well tended but could do with a few more visitors – like Kew Gardens on a bad day,' says Mel Jones, a 47-year-old poet. We all mutter empathetic noises and then switch our attention to the next guest in the circle: 'My lady garden is resting because I had a serious car accident recently and I've been worried about having sex – in case everything seizes up down there.' That's Laura, a 34-year-old dancer.

We are attending the new and fabulously outré *Fannyng Around* – a monthly meeting run by Sarah Berry, erotic writer and editor of *Foreplay* magazine. The gatherings, on the last Monday of the month, are a place for women to talk, whisper, giggle or get advice on their 'secret place'. Berry has one rule: what gets said in *Fannyng Around* stays in *Fannyng Around*. No question is too stupid and no experience too outrageous. I was touched by the accepting vibe of my female counterparts – all as curious and open-minded about exploring their sexual pleasure and sexual health as I am.

'I started the forum because I had vaginismus into my twenties – a psychological condition which makes penetration painful or impossible,' says Berry. 'I was insanely embarrassed about it. It led to me being depressed. I felt like a wimp. I went to see sex therapists and tried everything I could think of to get over it. It wasn't until I went on to write about sex that I realised there was nothing to be embarrassed about. Talking about what lies beneath is so important. It's what I always needed.'

Once the icebreaker is out of the way, we hear from Mouse, an erotic performer and dominatrix with jaw-dropping party tricks under her... well... pants. On stage, Mouse has put flowers, drinks and even goldfish up you-know-where. She can squirt water and blow air bubbles too, so she talks to us about lubes, muscle control and overcoming shyness.



Mouse. Berry plans to bring in experts on all sorts of saucy but sensible topics, from tantric sex to childbirth, plus porn stars with tips for stamina.

Manager of Sh! Joanna Wierzbicka, better known as the sex coach in C4's *The Joy Of Teen Sex*, also has a few gems to share. She produces a pair of black and pink love balls which, she tells us, are very important for toning our Kegel muscles – the ones that keep us, er, tight during sex and keep our bladders strong after childbirth. 'They are used for both exercise and pleasure,' says

Wierzbicka. 'They have a small weight inside them so when you squeeze around them it helps tone the muscle.'

This prompts one of the older members of the group to share her own past problems in that department and to describe the pelvic-floor exercises that helped. I see several women in the group beaming and writing down her tips.

And that's the spirit of *Fannyng Around*. There's a bit of sex science (though the organisers stress they are not medically trained) but it's mixed with personal experiences. In fact, it's hard to get a word in sometimes. 'I get



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get personal



No taboos: Women wear the pants at this meeting?

Picture: Gail Enigma

climax – does anyone else?' asks one quietly spoken 40-year-old legal secretary. We touch on fluctuating libido levels, latest vibrator models, frequency of sex health checks and even dreams: one well-dressed, happily married Australian financier blurts out: 'I keep having the same themed dream. My husband and I are looking for a place to have naughty sex. But we keep getting disturbed right when we are about to do it. What does that mean?'

Women's reasons for attending the meetings are varied. One 36-year-old retail manager says: 'It's a safe place where I can ask questions – where else could I meet someone who's been a dominatrix or a call girl?'

KD Grace, an erotic author, says: 'For my work, I have an ongoing curiosity about what women want, what worries them, what they need, what hurts them. We are all so varied and this is a safe place for them to come to talk about sex.'

But the simplest reason, says Berry, is intrigue: 'Everything about you that is normal to you is fascinating to everyone else. It's amazing when you hear women talking about her private place. You see her open up. Once you start comparing notes, you realise how unique we all are.'

Fannyng Around takes place at Sh! on the last Monday of every month. Advance booking essential. The cost of admission is a charity donation. www.fanniesrule.com

>The bare facts

■ The average depth of a vagina is between three to six inches.

■ The species with the largest vagina is the female blue whale, with a lady-place measuring between 1.8 to 2.4m.

■ The vagina and the eye are self-cleaning organs.

■ The average female orgasm lasts between six and ten seconds.

■ The longest recorded female orgasm was 43 seconds with 25 consecutive contractions to boot.

■ The most orgasms achieved in one hour was 134 for a woman, 16 for a man.

■ A recent study found 48 per cent of headache sufferers had pain cured by an orgasm. It's thought to be due to the release of endorphins.

■ Are you a screamer, even if the walls are thin? Dutch



researchers found the area of our brain related to self control and moral reasoning dipped in activity during orgasm.

■ The modern IUD birth control was invented in 1909.

■ According to The Kinsey Report (1953), 15 per cent of the female population are capable of multiple orgasms.

■ Some women have orgasms and don't know it. They may not feel their pelvic floor muscles contract but they still reach a peak of arousal leaving them all relaxed.

■ The G-spot is named after Dr Ernst Gräfenberg, a German doctor, known for studies on women's anatomy in the 1930s.

■ There are around 1,000 recognised slang words for the vagina.

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