

Dearest reader,

In this book we're going to explore adult content and themes. While we have thought carefully about everything included in this book, some of the language and stories may offend some people.

Much love,  
**YUMI & CLAUDINE**

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# LADIES, WE EVERYTHING WE'RE NOT SAYING ABOUT BODIES, HEALTH, SEX & RELATIONSHIPS NEED YUMI STYNES & TO CLAUDINE RYAN TALK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRACE LEE

Hardie Grant  
BOOKS

So we have laws, pornography and fashion all conspiring to tell the female population that when we look in the mirror, what we are seeing is NOT normal. This leads to fear, insecurity and dissatisfaction, or, to quote one's inner voice, *Eeeek! I'm not normal! I'm a freak!*

But what we must remember is that those beauty standards of what is 'normal' are being set by forces that DO NOT GIVE A DAMN about us.

Dr Bateson introduced us to an amazing resource called the Labia Library. As a response to the rising rates of cosmetic genital surgery, this online project was established to show women the extraordinary variety of labia.

She would also like to create something similar for discharge, not just for women but for their partners. 'I think a lot of the anxiety sometimes comes from their partners not recognising what's in this normal zone.'

Basically, it's time to stop caring about whether what's in our undies is normal – because you are normal! We are all normal! There is *no* normal! The spectrum of what is 'normal' is splendid and epic. And the spectrum of what we're shown is inhumanly narrow.

It's time to confidently and unreservedly accept that you have permission to be comfortable in your own body. To nourish it, care for it and do your best to understand it. To model acceptance to those you love and extend that compassion and acceptance to your global sisters and non-binary allies. To assuage any fears by sharing them with a doctor (more on page 190 about

awkward doctor conversations), and to normalise all that goes on inside your underpants by talking with your friends.

Remember, mates are an EXCELLENT resource. Every lady working on this book has had the experience of feeling slightly mortified about something that is going on with her body, only to find it's actually a normal thing once they talked about it with a trusted friend.

Trust and love? You give it to your friends. Now give it to yourself.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE QUEST FOR THE CLITORIS

**T**he verdict is in and it's unanimous: most of us derive our sexual pleasure from the clitoris. If a woman wants to feel physical enjoyment from erotic experiences, then the best organ for the job is the clitoris. In fact, pleasure is its main purpose. Getting our partners to find it and apply the right amount of pressure, however, is a *whole other thing*.

But – and this is a pretty big *but* – it seems that many of us have trouble locating our OWN clitoris. Survey after survey suggests that plenty of us get quite lost when we go looking for it.

So, if the clitoris is the star of the female orgasm, why is she so underwritten?

For much of history, the clitoris – as a word, concept and body part – has been overlooked and ignored. Not only is it missing from medical texts, but it's also missing from sex education, from social media and from our MOUTHS.

Think about it – when was the last time you said the word 'clitoris' without feeling like you should lower your voice or check to make sure no-one would be offended by what you were saying? Did you cringe and steel yourself against the 'ugliness' of the word, like you were about to say 'phlegm' or 'queef'?

We're willing to bet you a butt plug that even if you got top marks in school sex ed, you didn't learn anything about the clitoris. It's almost like ... *they didn't want us to know about it!*

But hang on – do you even really know about it now? Do you know the shape of your clitoris? What other body parts is it connected to? And, more importantly, do you know how to *find* it?

Ladies, we need to talk about the CLITORIS.



The disdain for women's genitalia goes waaaaay back and is embedded in the language that is used to describe our bodies. In the 1500s, when a French physician first dissected the clitoris, it was labeled 'membre honteux', which translates to 'shameful member'.

Dr Emily Nagoski is an author, self-confessed 'sex nerd' and virtuoso in women's pleasure. She says there was a view that women's genitals were tucked underneath their bodies because they were shameful, whereas men's genitals were front and centre. 'Why would [women's bits] be tucked away like that? Because god wanted women to be ashamed of their sexuality!'

Dr Nagoski says the clitoris was nowhere to be seen in the illustrations she saw in her school sex ed classes. 'Nowadays, if you're getting high-quality progressive sex education, you *might* get an illustration that has the little nub right at the top of the vulva'. (Refer back to the diagrams in chapter 1 if you need another refresh.)

She says there's a simple reason why the clitoris rarely rates a mention in class. 'Women's sexual pleasure doesn't really play a role in either male sexual pleasure or in reproduction. So why even bother talking about it?'

As for those awkward sex talks between parents and kids – pleasure is NOT the focus there. The first and only time Yumi heard her mum, Yoshiko, utter the word 'clitoris' was when she was a grown adult, recording the first episode of the podcast. Claudine has *still* never heard her mum say the word.

To be fair to our parents and sex ed teachers, people have NEVER been comfortable talking about female sexual pleasure and the importance of the clitoris.

Shocking fact?

**We didn't even know exactly what the clitoris looked like until 1998**, when a Melbourne woman published groundbreaking research.

Australia's first female urologist, Professor Helen O'Connell, is the legend responsible for leading the research team that fully mapped the anatomy of the clitoris.

## PUDENDUM

*Another name for the female genital package, which comes from pudēre meaning 'to be ashamed', which stems from the Latin pudenda meaning 'the shameful (parts)'.*

When Professor O'Connell was training to be a surgeon back in the 1980s, the main med school textbook, *Last's Anatomy*, devoted pages to the penis, prostate and testes, their many nerves, and what happened to these body parts during an erection. 'You would have this very detailed description on the male anatomy and then you'd sort of have an addendum about the female bit.

'I was particularly eager to see whether or not these really big nerves were described properly. But all they had in terms of description was that "the female nerve follows the same pattern as the male nerve, but by comparison it's very small". That was it!

'I had to spend a fair bit of time with this book. Not only was there an absence of the anatomy of the clitoris, but some pretty pejorative language around female structures.'

Forgive us for defining a word you probably already knew, but it's worth drawing attention to the fact that the world often talks about women's bodies – in particular women's genitals and in particular the clitoris – in *pejorative* terms.

The clitoris wasn't just given pejorative half-paragraphs in Professor O'Connell's textbooks. It's been pretty much ABSENT in academic anatomy texts, medical research or scientific journals throughout history.

For a long time the clit was considered the 'female equivalent of the penis', because of its structure, position and evolutionary origin. The word clitoris comes from the Greek word *kleitoris*, but it's not clear whether it was derived from *kleitys* (little hill), *kleiein* (to sheath) or *kleitoriazein* (to touch or titillate lasciviously). The term was coined by an Italian anatomist, Matteo Realdo Colombo. But his contemporary, the man known as the father of modern anatomy, Andreas Vesalius, had very little interest in the clitoris and pretty much denied its existence, saying that the clitoris did not exist in 'normal' healthy women.

When the clitoris did show up in research, the information lacked detail and contained inaccuracies – although we'd like to give a very honourable mention to Georg Ludwig Kobelt, a German anatomist who in the 1840s published intricate drawings and a comprehensive description of the female genitals, including the clitoris.

## PEJORATIVE

*Expressing contempt or disapproval.*

A real low point in academic appreciation of the clitoris came in 1948 when Dr Charles Mayo Goss deliberately ERASED it from the 25th edition of *Gray's Anatomy*, the bible of anatomy, of which he was the (male) editor.

Look, we don't know exactly why he made this decision. It could be that he accidentally lost the clitoris entry somewhere on the way to the printer. He might have forgotten. Maybe his low-level hum of disgust at this crucial organ grew so loud he was compelled to commit an act of academic vandalism so savage that modern women continue to experience the repercussions? We'll never know because, as (male) editor, he didn't have to explain his rationale.

One theory is that he subscribed to Freud's theories on sexuality, which were still quite popular at the time. Speaking of men who set back our understanding of the clitoris ... well, there are a few things to say about Sigmund Freud.

Freud was no fan of the clitoris. He theorised that women could only achieve sexual maturity when they had a vaginal orgasm while having penetrative sex with a man. In his 1905 work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he claimed that an inability to orgasm this way was a sign that a woman was 'frigid' and 'not a real woman'. His view was that reliance on clitoral stimulation for orgasm was evidence of 'immaturity'.

This idea may seem utterly ridiculous to us now, but it sparked a debate that has continued for more than 100 years. Those opposing the vaginal orgasm argument say penetration alone isn't going to bring most women to orgasm. Instead it's about direct stimulation of the clitoris by any means possible (finger, hand, tongue, sex toy ... whatever works for you). At various points in the last century, the pendulum has swung back and forth, with both sides of the debate pointing to published research that supports their view. It is worth noting that men were front and centre in the research that supports the superiority of the vaginal orgasm.

Where is the debate up to now? Well, technically it's still going. But without exception, every expert and woman we have spoken to agrees: if it's orgasms you're after, then focus on the clitoris. Some of us have wasted years of our sex lives feeling like failures because we couldn't orgasm vaginally when maybe we should have been having conversations with our partners about whether we need oral sex, certain types of clitoral touch or whether we'd just prefer to self-stimulate the clitoris during partnered sex. Sure, we can't blame Freud for all the problems with female sexuality, but his work certainly didn't help.

OK, where were we? That's right – no-one fully understood where the clitoris was, how it worked and what job it did. Even if you went looking for it

in a medical book – the universal teaching tool on human bodies – it was like the clitoris ... did not exist.

It wasn't just the failings of anatomy textbooks that drove Professor O'Connell to change this. Early in her career, in the 80s and 90s, she would often see older women who didn't know their urethra from their vagina. Which is to say in layperson's terms: they thought they peed out of their vaginas. 'The lack of knowledge and disconnect between the owner and their body when it came to anything in the pelvis ... it was as though someone else did truly own it.'

During her training, Professor O'Connell and her peers were taught how to preserve a man's erectile function during prostate surgery. Yet no-one knew enough about the female anatomy to even *consider* preserving a woman's sexual function during procedures. 'In terms of surgery it's fair to say that the "normal" was male and anything that wasn't male was "other".'

If women were to get surgical treatments that weren't going to harm their sexual function, surgeons needed a better understanding of female anatomy. 'I was interested in knowing whether or not the same sort of nerves were present in women. And what sort of efforts had been made to define surgical pathways that would preserve the nerves if they were present.'

So she decided to do something about it ...

That something involved Professor O'Connell and her team spending hundreds of hours methodically dissecting the bodies of women, young and old, donated for medical research, to learn as much as possible about how the clitoris worked. They took photographs and did lab tests, so they could share this knowledge with other scientists and the world. 'Being able to dissect these noticeably large nerves and highlight their relationship to bony structures, to the vaginal wall, to the urethra, to the clitoris itself – it was an intrinsically worthwhile thing to do.'

The research published in 1998 included detailed information and photographs of the many dissections Professor O'Connell had performed. Then, in the early 2000s, she followed this up with MRIs that supported her earlier findings. 'I had to just keep on being true to what the findings were. I found myself on a journey that I didn't dream or expect.'

Did the pioneering professor realise she was changing the way the world understood this vital organ?

'To be perfectly honest, it was 1998. I was having a baby, I was running a medical practice. I was busy beyond belief. I didn't have much brain space to think of how this was all going to pan out from an impact standpoint.' (This probably sounds familiar, whether or not you're working on amazing anatomical discoveries.)

Professor O'Connell's work helped dispel centuries of misinformation about women's bodies and sexuality, and provided a solid foundation of evidence for everyone to work from.

She has come to appreciate how important this work is for those of us with a clitoris. 'It is very exciting if I've in any way helped people understand their bodies.'



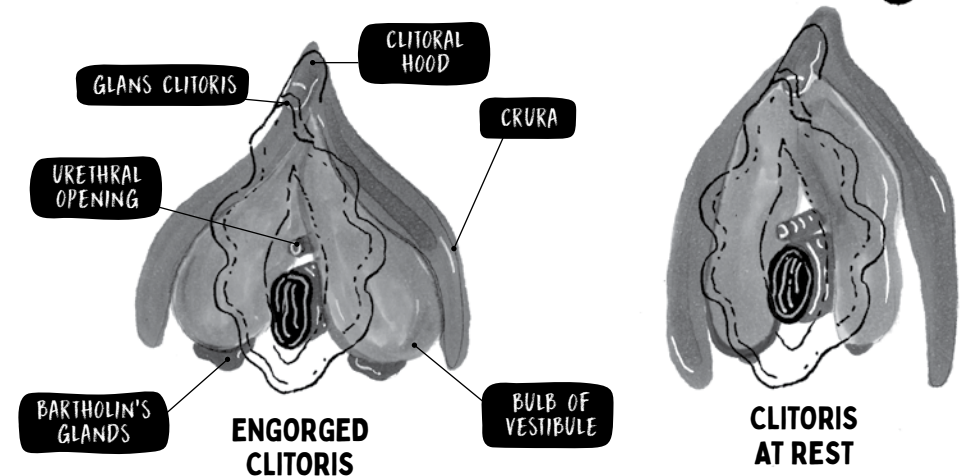
I wanted to share why I love this podcast. It reminded me that when I was in first year uni, at the age of flipping 19 (not that long ago – 2011), I learnt the full anatomy of the clitoris in a biology lecture given by a dude. He mentioned Professor Helen O'Connell's 'discovery' in 1998 and so many red flags entered my head. I was like: What the what – how have I gone through the mandatory state education system and no one has mentioned this? Mum, WTF? But also maybe you didn't know ... 1998, are you goddamn serious? I thought I lived in a progressive society – obviously a reality check. I had no idea I have this amazingly sized organ and only the tip of the iceberg – I've got some stuff to do! Thanks again for enlightening me (and all the women)! – **ANONYMOUS**



We now know exactly what the clitoris looks like. And thank goodness we can actually show you an illustration of it, because it's hard to describe it in audio format. Creating a 'word picture' of what a clitoris looks like threw up some challenges for the podcast, and Yumi's solution was to compare it to a penguin.

Admittedly, it does look a bit like a penguin with its little flippers out. But instead of a round tummy, it's got two tummies hanging down like balls. And in a human body? All you can actually SEE of the penguin is its beak.

Imagine the clitoris as an iceberg: the only bits you can see or touch are the glans clitoris and clitoral hood (the penguin's beak). The remaining 90 per cent, which includes the crura and bulbs, is submerged, sitting inside the pelvis and wrapped around the bottom end of the labia, vagina and urethra. While the glans and hood are only a few millimetres long, the full clitoris can be up to 9 centimetres (about as long as a credit card).



Much of the clitoris is made up of erectile tissue that swells when you get aroused. So, much like a penis, your clitoris gets bigger when you're horny. And we're not just talking about the beak of the penguin getting bigger, we're talking about the whole thing – flippers, double tummies, ALL of the penguin! The bulbs of your clitoris swell and push into the walls of the vagina, which is ballooning out to make room for whatever is going in there, be it fingers, penis, dildo, cucumber, etc.

The clitoris is a high-quality sensory organ with up to 15,000 nerve endings. Its bulbs and crura are made of the same tissue as the penis. All these nerve endings are responsible for those tingly orgasmic sensations we experience throughout our pelvic area when we masturbate or have sex.

As for the controversial G-spot? The Grafenberg spot is supposed to be a few centimetres inside your vagina on the front wall, and some say it is a magical erogenous zone bringing orgasms galore ... if you can *find* it. But research co-authored by Professor O'Connell in 2016 found that it doesn't exist as an anatomical construct. The paper – 'The "G-Spot" is Not a Structure Evident on Macroscopic Anatomic Dissection of the Vaginal Wall' – gives it all away in the title. It also provides pretty compelling evidence that the reason this area can bring so much pleasure is because internal structures of the clitoris are on the other side of this spot on the vaginal wall, so it's clitoral tissue that is being stimulated.

The clitoris straddles the vaginal opening, so it can be engaged in certain positions during penetrative sex. And while extensive studies of female orgasms show that most women need clitoral stimulation to come, there will always be women who go their own way. Each of us needs to figure out which parts of our bodies give us pleasure.



A lot of us find the best way to reach orgasm during coupled sex is to stimulate the clitoris ourselves. Sexologists say the most common way for heterosexual women to reach orgasm during intercourse is through direct clitoral stimulation – often with our own fingers or hand. Yes, the male partner can sometimes have a crack, but we know the pressure we want, we know the kind of touch we prefer, we know the rhythm that works, and we know our fingernails are clean! Like they say: if you want a job done right, sometimes you gotta do it yourself. (There's a lot more on this in the chapter on the orgasm gap.)

Our favourite sex nerd Dr Nagoski has some sage advice for clitoris owners: 'The more we can make friends with our clitoris and welcome it precisely as it is, the more it's going to bring pleasure and joy into our lives.'

Pleasure and joy! Who doesn't want more of that?

Making new friends is always a bit awkward, but it can also be the beginning of something beautiful. If you'd like to make friends with your clitoris but feel as though you don't know where to start, Dr Nagoski says, 'The way we can change that is by learning to turn towards our bodies, look directly at our clitoris, touch our clitoris and explore it with curiosity instead of shame.'

Dr Nagoski is pretty clear on the first step to making friends with your clitoris.

**'Go visit her. Get yourself a little hand mirror,  
take off your clothes and look at your vulva.'**

Don't be alarmed if you feel uncomfortable about doing this. Dr Nagoski says she felt like she was confronting an enemy the first time she looked at herself in this way. She experienced a strong emotional reaction – but not because she was shocked by what she saw. 'I looked at my own genitals and I burst into tears, because it turned out to be nothing secret or scary or shameful or embarrassing at all. It was just a part of my body, just like all the other parts of my body.'

For Dr Nagoski this was a defining moment where she learnt that her body is the 'ultimate source of wisdom' on her sexuality – and she believes that's the case for all of us. 'Our bodies are already telling us what we need to know if we're willing to listen kindly and compassionately without fear.'

But given that approximately 90 per cent of your clitoris is *inside* your body, if you want to become besties with your clit, you will need to go a bit further than a peek in the mirror. You're going to need to get your hands involved in this exploration.



## GETTING HANDS-ON WITH YOUR CLITORIS

Before you proceed, check in with yourself. Because self-consent is a real thing too. NOBODY has to do something they don't want to, even if it's obeying the voice in your own head saying, 'You *should*'.

You should do what you want.

You should also have clean hands and neat fingernails!

When you're exploring, be aware that the clitoris can be sensitive to touch, *not* sensitive to touch or *amazing* to touch at different times or stages of arousal.

OK? Good. Let's get started.

- 1. Get comfortable.** Make sure you are in a space where you feel safe and comfortable. You want to take your time, so use any pillows or other props that are going to help you feel as relaxed as possible.
- 2. Use lubricant if you want.** Dr Nagoski recommends using lube to reduce any friction that has the potential for tearing or pain. Lubricant will make sensations more pleasurable. 'Some people really like to use coconut oil. Others like to use a commercial lube. You can just use spit if you want to.' Go with what sounds good for you and your sheets.

3. **Start in your head.** You know that feeling when you're already in a sexy state of mind, a little bit turned on, and your partner tickles you and it feels nice? But if your partner tries to tickle you when you're in the middle of an argument, it's ... not so nice? Your clitoris is sort of the same. This is a long way of saying: sensations will not necessarily feel pleasurable and satisfying unless you're in a state of mind where it feels safe, welcoming and non-judgemental. 'Don't start with your hands. Start with your imagination,' says Dr Nagoski. 'Just say hello to your genitals from your brain. Think about them.'
4. **Notice the noise.** Notice the internal chatter going on in your head when you're feeling certain sensations – without any judgement. Dr Nagoski suggests asking yourself two questions: *What kind of emotions do you have when you touch your own body? And what sort of feelings do you have about your body and the sensations it's sending?* Allow yourself to explore what pleasure feels like.
5. **Work from the outside in.** When you are ready to touch yourself, start by gently touching the skin far away from your genitals. Touch your arms, legs, head or face. 'You want to notice what sensation feels like when you touch yourself,' says Dr Nagoski. Then when you are comfortable, and in your own time, move from the outer parts of your body towards the inner parts. Use your hands to touch along the insides of your thighs. Explore the area adjacent to the genitals – the mounds, the curves, the lines.
6. **Play with different sensations.** Our bodies are capable of so many different kinds of sensations, from light touch on the surface of the skin, to deep touch that pushes down into the muscles, to stretching sensations of tendons and muscles inside our bodies. Those sensations are all happening in different nerve endings in the skin itself. As you gradually move your way around your body and towards your genitals, give yourself time to experiment and to really feel each sensation.
7. **Breathe deeply.** Right down into your belly. Then imagine you can breathe down into your genitals – notice how that feels.

8. **Find your clitoris.** You've looked at your clitoris by now, so you know where it is. Now rely on touch to feel where it is. You might feel a rubbery-cord-type-thing underneath the skin right at the top where the labia divide – this is the shaft. Press down and feel the whole length of your clitoris. Feel the whole shape and size of it, knowing that it will change as you become increasingly aroused. These sensations may not necessarily feel super pleasurable or erotic, especially at the beginning, but this is an exploratory exercise (remember, you're just making friends).
9. **Notice how your clitoris changes.** As you begin touching your genitals, notice how it changes. Notice that the way it feels to touch your clitoris when your sexual arousal is at zero is not the same as when it's at eight or nine.
10. **Notice how your whole body changes.** Take a moment to notice how your whole body feels different. The tension in your muscles will feel different. The way your brain perceives a sensation is *really* different.

If making friends with your clit means really, really making each other feel good? At this point, you may be seized by an almost undeniable desire to continue stroking your new bestie. If orgasms have eluded you, there's no guarantee you can get them here, but it should still feel excellent. We've dedicated a whole chapter to addressing the orgasm gap, and masturbation is an essential part of training for pleasure. Turn to the end of this chapter for a beginner's guide.



Comedian, actor and performer Tessa Waters was well into her 20s before she befriended her clitoris. The two had been briefly acquainted when Tessa was a child and had enjoyed rubbing herself against one of her favourite soft toys – a yellow five-pointed star pillow.

‘I was sort of riding it like a horse and figuring out which point of the star was the most durable. I didn’t actually orgasm, but I remember I was trying to be very, very quiet.’

Tessa also remembers feeling ashamed afterwards. ‘I wasn’t sure where this shame came from. My folks aren’t the sort to make you feel that, and I didn’t grow up with shame.’ She just had the feeling that she’d done something wrong or forbidden.

‘But there was also this sense of new strength that I had, and I didn’t understand that either.’

Tessa’s feelings of shame may strike a chord for many of us. From a young age, we’re told not to touch ourselves, and when we do, our hands are slapped away or we’re told we’re dirty.

Dr Nagoski says these moments teach us that our bodies don’t quite belong to us. Every time it happens it reinforces the message that ‘there is a certain part of our body that is a source of disgust and horror. This one moment will accumulate with countless other similar moments until, by the time we get to adolescence, we can’t articulate why, but we’re barely aware of our genitals. We certainly don’t feel like we could or should be touching our genitals.’

For Tessa these feelings meant ‘I didn’t masturbate again until I was in my 20s’. Yep, you read that right. Tessa didn’t masturbate until she was in her 20s. For years she’d heard friends talk about clitoral orgasms and wondered why it hadn’t happened to her.

She finally made friends with her clitoris when she was 29.

***‘When it finally happened and it was so amazing, I was relieved because I thought, “My body can do this.”’***

Then came sadness and anger, because she’d wasted time – and orgasms – thinking her body wasn’t capable of experiencing that kind of sexual pleasure. ‘I hadn’t had [an orgasm] because I didn’t know my body and I didn’t feel empowered to ask my partner to help me discover my body.’

Soon after, Tessa started having sex with women and it was at this point her friendship with her clitoris, and with her whole body, really took off. What she learnt about pleasure was simple.

‘It’s about listening and it’s about asking. It’s much more about the whole pleasure, not just the coming at the end and the kind of triumphant-like, “Oh, well, I did really good!”’

These days, Tessa talks about the clitoris all the time. Actually, she doesn’t just talk about it – she puts on her sequinned vulva shoulder pads and sings, dances and performs cabaret numbers about it with the Fringe Wives Club. Their show *Glittery Clittery: A Consensual Party* is all about combating misogyny and teaching audiences a thing or two about the female anatomy.

After every performance, audience members of all genders seek out Tessa and her bandmates to tell them how the show has changed their lives and their relationship with their clitoris.

*I didn’t know it was there.*

*I’ve never even said it aloud.*

*I feel like I’m allowed to be angry.*

*I’m allowed to ask for pleasure.*

After one performance, Tessa’s mum, Claire, was one of those people who found that everything had been cracked wide open.

‘My husband and I were looking at one another, our jaws dropping, and saying, “How did we not know that?” We also both felt a bit sad that we didn’t have the information ourselves to tell her as she was growing up.’

(Also sitting in the crowd at the show that night with Claire was none other than clitoris cartographer Professor O’Connell. When the crowd found out she was there, they started chanting: ‘Melbourne’s got the clit.’ Yes, Melbourne’s also got trams and terrible traffic, but for obvious reasons, the chant became a permanent part of Tessa’s show.)

Watching Tessa’s show made Claire reflect on what she hadn’t shared with her daughter, as well as her own experience of being raised in a convent. She’d had about 10 minutes of sex education where she was taught about periods and reproduction ... and, well, that was it.

‘Everything was just your bottom. You didn’t know there were different parts. It was very, very confusing. I think it leaves you open to abuse and embarrassment and humiliation and mistakes.’

Claire thinks we’re now in the middle of a sexuality revolution, one that started with the work of Professor O’Connell. And if she had her time over again, Claire would try to give her daughter Tessa a different understanding of her body. One that is based on simple and clear information, science and evidence, without the shame and guilt.



Claire also wanted to help change sex education in schools so she drew a 17-page illustrated guide to the male and female anatomies. 'If you don't know how your body works, how do you know what's normal when you go out there?'

Dr Nagoski has a fairly simple suggestion for how we overcome the clitoris taboo. 'The way we can conquer learnt fears or learnt disgust is by letting ourselves connect with that thing that we are afraid of or disgusted by.'

'Clitorises come in so many different shapes and sizes and they are all healthy and normal, as long as they're not in pain. So, look at them! Have conversations like this about them! Learn to view them without that fear and instead just be like, "This is normal. Here's a clitoris. It's normal. Here's a different clitoris." It is a normal part of life.'

## A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MASTURBATION

Yumi thought her school friends were cagey or private about masturbation and that's why they never talked about it. Later she realised a lot of them didn't talk about it because they didn't *do* it. Some didn't get started until well into adulthood.

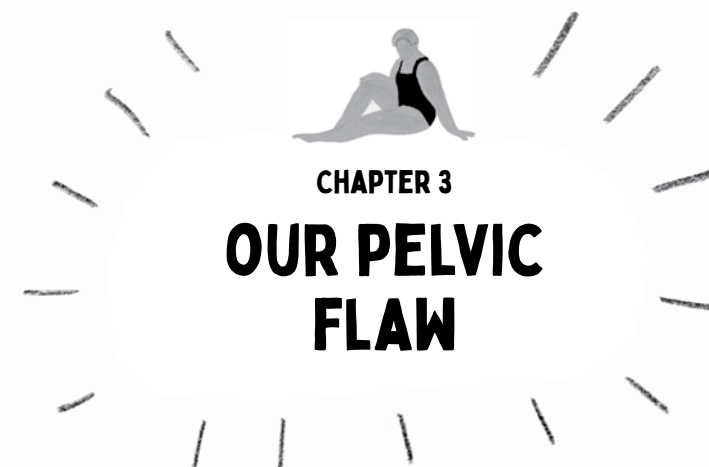
If that's you too, it's pretty standard. In 2014, one of Australia's biggest ever sexual health surveys (the Second Australian Study of Sexual Health and Relationships) found that only ONE in FOUR women said they masturbated regularly – whereas half the blokes said they did. (Although we also need to allow for the fact that women might feel less comfortable admitting that they masturbate.)

If you're not masturbating regularly, you might not be a beginner at all, you might just be tired! It's hard to self-pleasure after a massive day of parenting or work stress. And while there are some heady life phases that are wild with wanking, there are quieter periods where the only kind of horny we feel is horny for doughnuts.

But experts agree that masturbation has a bunch of benefits that last way longer than your average orgasm. So, if you've made friends with your clitoris and are now ready to take the next step, here are some tips to get you started.

- 1. Get your head in the game.** Like any kind of sex, masturbation is best if you're in the mood. What mentally turns you on? Watching good porn? Reading erotic literature? Fantasising about that hottie? (You know the one ... they never have to know.) Is it being on Day 14 of your menstrual cycle and getting a pay rise? There are everyday triggers that can send your hands diving into your underpants. Whatever they are, use them.
- 2. Be safe.** Feeling like you have the freedom and privacy to explore is crucial. Lock the door, switch off phones, close laptops and make sure no-one is going to burst in.
- 3. Clean hands, tidy nails.** You know this, but just sayin'.

4. **Get comfy.** Most people with a vulva like to spread it out. This might mean lying in bed, splaying your legs on the couch or arranging some sort of headrest in the bath. (A wank on the toilet is not as glamorous, but there are times when it'll do.)
5. **Touch the parts of yourself that want to be touched.** As we're going to learn in our chapter on the orgasm gap, our erogenous zones extend far beyond the clitoris and there are many ways you can touch yourself to build up your sense of pleasure. Remember: work from the outside in.
6. **No pressure!** In solo AND partnered sex, feeling pressure to orgasm can really be an orgasm killer. Since masturbation is just for you, there is no pressure to orgasm. You won't have failed if you don't. Relax and enjoy it.
7. **Stimulate your clitoris.** There are (literally) a million ways to do this: you can use your fingers, a pillow, a stuffed bear or a sex toy to caress, rub and stimulate your clitoris. Side-to-side, round-and-round motions are favoured. Mostly, they're repetitive and start off quite gently. Don't forget the bits on the inside. You can stimulate the internal parts of your clitoris by pressing on the shaft (the rubbery-cord-type-thing underneath the skin right at the top where the labia divide); by putting your thumbs, finger pads or the heels of your hand where the labia are connected to the body (your bulbs and crura are just below the skin surface); or from the inside by pressing the front vaginal wall of the vagina as you become aroused.
8. **Clench and release your pelvic muscles.** Imagine you're gripping something with your vagina, then letting it go. Repeat. This, combined with clitoral stimulation, contributes to the 'build' sensation as your pleasure increases.
9. **Pack up and go home.** Just kidding.
10. **Slightly increase pressure until explosions of pleasure make you want to stop.** This is called 'having an orgasm', and it's like fireworks from your fanny, laser-beam lightshows from your labia, an explosion of pussy butterflies – all the good things, all the good chemicals. And guess what? You did it all by yourself.



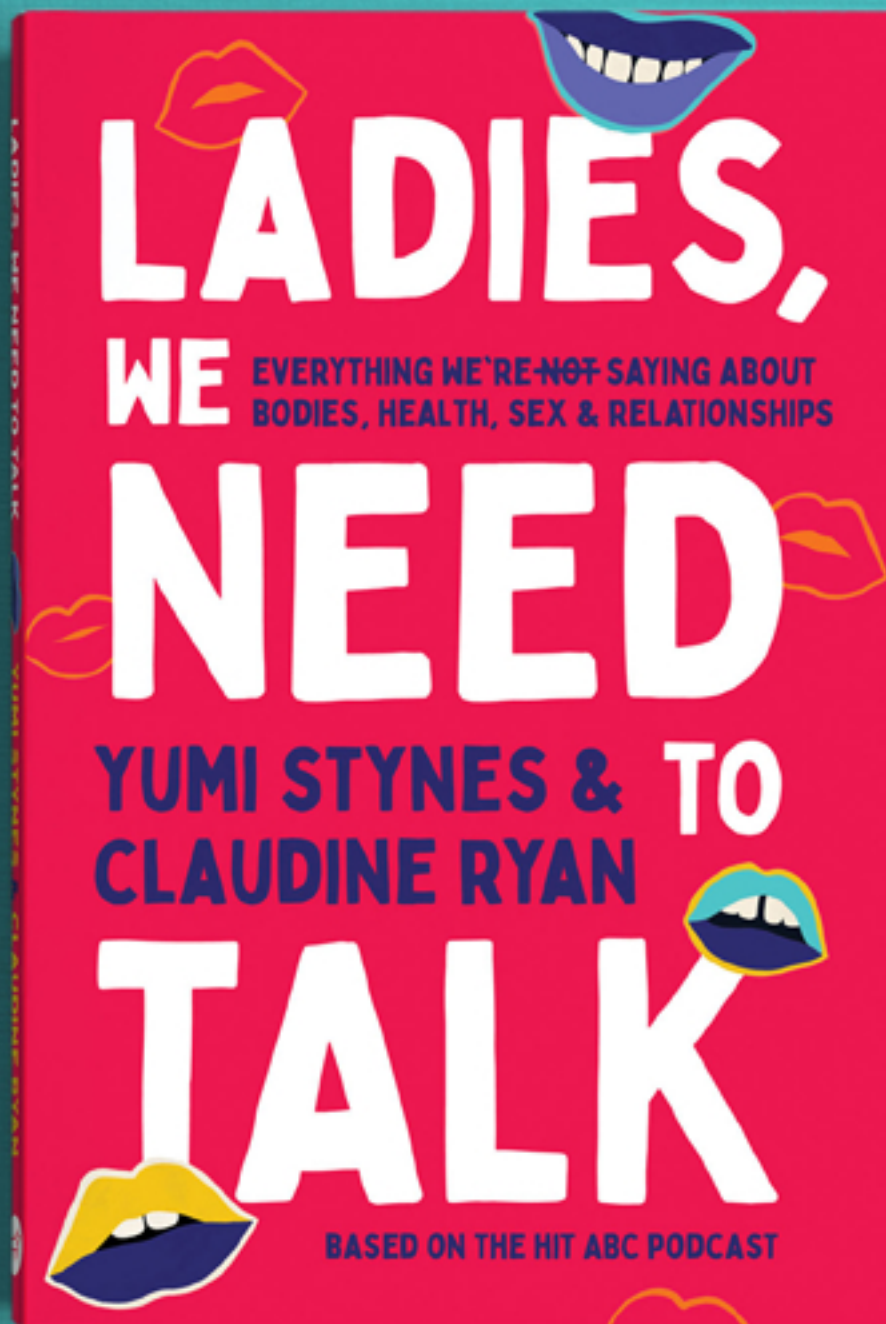
If the charter of *Ladies, We Need To Talk* is to unpack taboos, then the need to talk about problems with the pelvic floor should be written into our constitution. It fits the criteria perfectly. Is it situated in the underpants region? Yes. Does it involve leaking or unruly female bodies? Yes. Do lots of us experience this thing? YES. And do we feel free to talk about it? NO.

When you look at the stats on prolapse and pelvic floor disorders (like these ones from the Continence Foundation of Australia), it's easy to see why listeners were begging for us to talk more about the pelvic floor.

- ★ Three quarters of those with any incontinence are women.
- ★ 1 in 3 women will experience some form of urinary incontinence.
- ★ 61 per cent of those who have given birth experience incontinence.
- ★ 50 per cent of those who have children will experience some degree of prolapse.
- ★ Pelvic floor issues can cause incontinence, pelvic pain and painful sex.



Prolapse – it's like a hidden secret and yet almost 50% of people who give birth will get one. Unfortunately I'm one of the unlucky ones who had one at the age of 36. Lateral avulsion (pelvic floor muscles torn off the bone, yet the birth itself was a great experience). There is no cure. Still struggling to come to terms with it four years later. – LOUISE



*Ladies, We Need to Talk*  
by Yumi Stynes  
& Claudine Ryan

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