

CHAPTER 25

Afterplay

After orgasm, a period of so-called resolution occurs. There is a rapid loss of most of the penile erection, followed by a slower return to normal size. The testes drop to their normal position and return to their normal size. The scrotum loosens and scrotal folds reappear. In the male, a highly variable refractory period (generally shorter in younger males and increasing in duration with age) occurs, during which another episode of ejaculation is not possible. He loses his nipple erection.

The clitoris returns to its normal position within 5-10 seconds after orgasm, the orgasmic platform disappears and the vaginal lips return to normal thickness, position and colour. The vagina returns to its resting size quickly but return to its resting colour may take as long as 10-15 minutes. The uterus and cervix descend to their unstimulated positions. The areola returns to normal size quickly but nipple erection disappears more slowly.

In both sexes, the sex flush rapidly disappears but irregular neuromuscular tension may continue, as shown by involuntary twitches or contractions of isolated muscle groups. The heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure return to baseline (preexcitation) levels. Visual and auditory acuity return to usual levels. A general sense of relaxation is usually prominent.

This bald account of physiological happenings is by no means all there is to it. Many (especially women) find the post-coital relaxation phase the most satisfying part of sex. And yet many abruptly terminate it - to their loss. This is the time to cuddle and caress; to say, 'I love you'; to express sexual feelings and thoughts you've not shared; to explore and experiment. It is a time for displaying total affection at a time when she is most content, relaxed and trusting. It is not a time to hold a sexual postmortem or to introduce problems - sexual or otherwise.

Unfortunately, many males are overcome with a deep desire for sleep after orgasm but, if they can postpone this natural urge - even if only for five minutes - they may experience the ineffable delight of going to sleep in the arms of a lover who feels completely fulfilled. If afterplay becomes foreplay and delays that delicious time, so be it, but each partner - and males in particular - should beware of automatically interpreting loving gestures as a desire for further explicitly sexual activity.