

Rimming (Analingus): The Curious Lovers' Guide to Oral-Anal Contact

By Michael Castleman

It's quite possible that you're turned off by the thought of kissing or licking your lover's anus, or having this done to you. If that's how you feel, don't do it.

But the fact is, many lovers are curious about rimming, clinically known as analingus, and often feel surprised that they are interested. If they try it, some become quite turned on by rimming.

Many lovers have an accidental introduction to analingus during cunnilingus. The bottom of the vaginal entrance is quite close to the anus. Sometimes, a little lick meant for the lower vaginal lips slips further south than intended, and either the provider (the rimmer), the recipient (the rimmee), or both experience unexpected delight—and sometimes a surprisingly powerful urge to explore analingus further.

For other lovers, interest in rimming develops from anal play. The most popular anal activities are sphincter massage and fingering, with a much smaller proportion enjoying butt plugs and penis-anus intercourse. But as people explore any form of anal eroticism they feel comfortable with, some warm up to the idea of analingus.

Just Another Way to Play

There is absolutely nothing abnormal or wrong with being interested in rimming. If you feel tempted to condemn it, remember that not too long ago, oral sex was considered a disgusting perversion and was outlawed in many states. Now oral sex is generally accepted. In recent sex surveys, about three-quarters of Americans say they have given and received it.

Rimming probably won't become as popular as oral, but in recent years, Americans have become somewhat more sexually experimental. Surveys by researchers at the University of Chicago and the University of California, San Francisco, suggest that

around 15 percent of American adults have experienced some form of anal sex play—more than 20 million people. There are no statistics on rimming, but as lovers become more comfortable with sexual experimentation in general, and anal play in particular, it should come as no surprise that many—both heterosexuals and homosexuals—express curiosity about analingus.

Why Analingus Feels Erotic

Analingus feels erotic for the same reason that anal play in general feels arousing. The anus and surrounding tissue are richly endowed with nerves highly sensitive to gentle, playful, loving touch. The same is true for the lips and tongue. Put these areas together, and the combination can be powerfully erotic.

There's another reason why anal stimulation, including analingus, feels erotic. Beneath the anal-area skin surface lie the pelvic floor muscles, which form a figure-8 around the anus and penis in men and the vulva in women. The pelvic floor muscles play an important role in sex. They're the ones that contract during orgasm. Massaging the anal area with fingers, sex toys, or a tongue, or inserting anything into the anus stimulates the pelvic floor muscles, and heightens overall erotic sensations.

Finally, sex draws a good deal of its emotional power from lovers' wholehearted acceptance of each other. Analingus involves acceptance of an area that's often not accepted, in fact, one that's usually rejected. Analingus becomes a way for the rimmer to say: I love every square inch of you. No part of your wonderful body turns me off. And it's a way for the rimee to say: I'm totally yours. No part of me is off limits to you. You are free to enjoy every square inch of me. This level of mutual acceptance can be a powerful turn-on.

Raising the Issue

If you're interested in rimming, raise the issue before you dive into it. Some couples prefer to discuss sexual experimentation in nonsexual settings. Others like to discuss experimentation while making love. Raise the issue in the way you feel most comfortable in your relationship.

If you and your lover have open and frank sexual communication, you might simply announce that you'd like to try analingus. On the other hand, if you feel reluctant to admit your interest—the case for many people—you might raise the issue indirectly, perhaps by mentioning offhandedly that you read something about rimming—

perhaps a question on GreatSexAfter40.com—and has your lover ever considered it?

If your honey gags and grimaces, chances are that analingus won't become part of your intimate repertoire. No one should ever feel pressured into try rimming—or anything else sexual.

But if your lover shows any interest—even if it's couched in skepticism and concern about hygiene—you may detect enough of an opening, as it were, to pursue the issue, answer your lover's questions, allay his or her concerns, and perhaps introduce rimming into your lovemaking.

If you decide to experiment with analingus, you also need to discuss who's interested in which role. Some people are interested in only one side of a rimming interaction—rimmer or rimmee. Others feel equally comfortable in both roles. Before you begin, discuss this, and be sure you're clear on who does what.

The Big Fear: Fecal Contact

Because the anus is involved in defecation, many people assume that rimming must involve contact with feces. This is possible. Even with good wiping, traces of fecal material may cling to the anus and the skin around it.

However, careful personal hygiene minimizes exposure. San Francisco sex therapist Jack Morin, Ph.D., author of *Anal Pleasure and Health*, the classic guide to anal sex, insists that contrary to the conventional wisdom, the anus, anal canal, and rectum usually contain surprisingly little stool. Most fecal material is stored above the rectum in the descending colon. When stool moves into the rectum, you feel “the urge,” and fairly quickly that material passes out of the body. Most of the time, when you feel no urge to defecate, there are only trace amounts of stool in the rectum, anal canal, and anus, traces that can be easily washed out.

Washing the anal area carefully with soap and water before lovemaking almost always removes any traces of fecal material—another good reason to bathe or shower together before sex.

The Infection Connection

Another important consideration is the possibility that analingus might expose the rimmer to digestive-tract bacteria. The anus is the end of the digestive tract. Millions

of bacteria that assist in digestion eventually pass through it, notably *E. coli*. These micro-organisms get incorporated into stool and can be found in and around the anus. Although they help with digestion, they might also cause infection. If *E. coli* come in contact with the vagina or a woman's urethra (urine tube, which opens slightly above the vagina), the woman might develop a vaginal infection (bacterial vaginosis), or a urinary tract infection (UTI, also known as cystitis or bladder infection). That's why a standard recommendation for anal play is that nothing that comes in contact with the anus should subsequently touch the vulva or vagina.

The digestive tract might also contain other harmful micro-organisms that can be spread during oral-anal contact, among them:

- Other bacteria. Two significant germs are *Shigella* and *Salmonella*, which cause food poisoning. Usually these germs cause acute—often vicious—diarrhea. But it's possible for one person to have symptoms that are hardly noticed, yet transmit the infection to another, who develops severe symptoms.
- Intestinal parasites, notably *Giardia lamblia*, and amoebas, both of which cause of diarrhea.
- Viruses, notably the one that causes hepatitis A, and HIV, the AIDS virus. HIV typically spreads through blood-to-blood contact. Anal tissue bleeds easily, particularly in the estimated one-third of American adults who have hemorrhoids. (These varicose veins of the anal canal often cause pain, but frequently do not, so affected individual may not know they have them.) If a rimmee's HIV-contaminated blood enters the mouth of a rimmer who has a minor injury, for example, bleeding gums, the infection might be transmitted. This is not likely, but it's possible.

Fun Without Fear

Because infections—including HIV—might be transmitted during anilingus, it's crucial that lovers who play this way take prudent precautions:

- Wash thoroughly with soap and water. Before any sexual encounter involving oral-anal play, the lover about to be rimmed should wash carefully around and inside his or her anus.

- Consider showering together. Beyond washing, the prospective rimmer might feel more comfortable if both of you shower together. That way, the rimmer can wash the rimmee's anus to his or her satisfaction. In addition to cleanliness, showering together beforehand is a sensual way to relax and transition into lovemaking.
- Consider an enema. For an extra margin of hygiene safety, the rimmee might use an enema or two before washing. Enemas rinse the rectum and anal canal, removing most traces of fecal material. It's easiest to use disposable Fleet enemas, available over-the-counter from pharmacies. The rimmee gets down on elbows and knees, and that person or the lover inserts the flexible nozzle into the receiving anus, then gently squeezes the bottle, pushing the enema fluid up the anal canal into the rectum. After a few minutes, the person sits on the toilet and allows the fluid to drain out. The bottle can be refilled with warm water and reused.
- Dam it. Dental dams are thin sheets of latex rubber that act as a physical barrier between the rimmee's anus and the rimmer's mouth. Think of them as condoms for the butt. At first, they may feel awkward to use, but like condoms, with a little practice (and a sense of humor), they can be easily incorporated into analingus. Dental dams are available at pharmacies. Or simply buy unlubricated condoms or latex gloves and cut them into flat sheets. Or use plastic food wrap. To heighten pleasure, massage a little sexual lubricant into the rimmee's anus before applying the dam.
- Rinse after. After analingus without a dam, the rimmer should rinse his or her mouth, with water, or preferably with a commercial antiseptic mouthwash.
- Assess your risk. As discussed, oral-anal contact can be medically hazardous, and lovers who try analingus should take recommended precautions. This is especially true for those who are nonmonogamous, or who feel unsure about their partner's HIV status or general health.

On the other hand, in truly monogamous couples, where both people are confident that neither has hepatitis, HIV, or intestinal parasites, the only real risk of analingus is contact with fecal material and digestive bacteria—and enemas and careful washing virtually eliminate this. According to Morin, in healthy, monogamous couples who practice careful anal hygiene, the risk of analingus causing infection or

illness is “extremely low.” Consider your situation carefully. Discuss it. Then decide for yourselves the appropriate level of precautions for the two of you.

Analingus Techniques and Tips

Certain positions allow oral-anal contact with a minimum of contortions:

- **Knees and elbows.** The rimmee assumes the position typically used for rear-entry (doggie style) intercourse. The rimmer kneels or squats behind. Either lover may gently spread the rimmee’s buttocks cheeks to expose that person’s anus.
- **Standing bent over.** The rimmee stands and bends at the waist. The rimmer kneels, sits, or squats behind.
- **Lying supine.** The rimmee lies on his or her back, legs bent, knees drawn up to the chest or apart. The rimmer squats or lies on his or her stomach. It often helps in this position to place a pillow or bolster under the rimmee’s hips. This raises the anus, allowing the rimmer easier access.
- **Sixty-nine.** Compared with mutual oral-genital contact, mutual analingus requires somewhat more physical flexibility, but some people enjoy this position.

Once you’re both in position for analingus, here are some tips on technique:

- **Approach the anus slowly.** Some rimmees enjoy having the rimmer plunge into analingus. But unless this is specifically requested, the rimmer should approach this highly sensitive area slowly. On the way, massage, kiss, and lick the person’s lower back, thighs, hips, and buttocks as you slowly work your way to his or her anus. A slow approach builds anticipation for what’s about to happen, and often heightens the eroticism of analingus.
- **Talk it up.** The rimmer can announce what’s about to happen: “I’m going to eat your ass like you’ve never been eaten before!” “Every part of you excites me.” Or something similar. The rimmee can beg for analingus: “Lick my ass!” “Give me your tongue.” Or cheer the rimmer on: “That feels so good. Don’t stop!” Knowing your lover is turned-on can feel very erotic.

- Use your lips. Kiss the rimmee's anus and the area around it.
- Use the flat of your tongue. Press it against the rimmee's anus.
- Use the tip of your tongue. Wiggle it around the rimmee's anus, or slip it inside and move it in and out, or wiggle it around in circles.
- Make noise. Sucking or munching sounds can be a real turn-on.

The Intimacy Connection

Even if you and your lover ultimately decide not to try anilingus, or to abandon it, the discussions involved in considering it can deepen the intimacy you share. You learn more about yourself and each other. You become clearer about what you're willing and unwilling to try. In the end, as it were, these discussions help you both feel closer to one another, and better able to experience sexual pleasure from the activities you both enjoy.