



Gross Anatomy: Dispatches from the Front (and Back)

Mara Altman

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An honest, funny, neurotic, and totally gross love child of Mindy Kaling and Mary Roach.

"Forget that old fake news about sugar and spice. With wit and candor, Mara Altman tells us what girls are really made of -- and it's a hair-raising revelation." --Tom Robbins, author of *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* and *Jitterbug Perfume*

Mara Altman's volatile and apprehensive relationship with her body has led her to wonder about a lot of stuff over the years. Like, who decided that women shouldn't have body hair? And how sweaty is too sweaty? Also, why is breast cleavage sexy but camel toe revolting? Isn't it all just cleavage? These and questions like them have led to the comforting and sometimes smelly revelations that constitute *Gross Anatomy*, an essay collection about what it's like to operate the bags of meat we call our bodies.

Divided into two sections, "The Top Half" and "The Bottom Half," with cartoons and doodles scattered throughout, Altman's book takes the reader on a wild and relatable journey from head to toe--as she attempts to strike up a peace accord with our grody bits.

By using a combination of personal anecdotes and fascinating research, *Gross Anatomy* holds up a magnifying glass to our beliefs, practices, biases, and body parts and shows us the naked truth--that there is greatness in our grossness.

Gross Anatomy: Dispatches from the Front (and Back) Details

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From Reader Review *Gross Anatomy: Dispatches from the Front (and Back)* for online ebook

Judy Altman says

The author's use of analogies and metaphors is uncanny. Things you have never heard before that are both clever and funny, are interspersed in her exasperation and expression of those parts of our anatomy that are, indeed, gross. Plus the honest relationship she has with her friends, husband and mother make the book warm and special. She tells it like it is. Lots of out loud laughter in this book and often, just a big smile and a warm heart.

Melissa says

Gross Anatomy Or Petition To Rename Camel Toe to Koala Paw

If you've ever had a moment where your body has betrayed you and you wonder, "Why are you like this?" then this is the book for you. Mara Altman has questions. Excessive sweating, why?! Hemorrhoids, why?! PMS, real or fake?! She then tracks down the experts and try to find out why we are the way we are. The book is full of cool/weird little medical tidbits and Altman's funny running commentary. While the book doesn't go into too much depth about any one thing it does give you enough to not feel like a total freak of nature. This book is best enjoyed on the phone with your most trusted friend while you compare the length or your nipple hair and wonder, "Nipple hair, why?"

Earl says

Gross Anatomy from Mara Altman is both a laugh out loud collection of personal essays as well as an "I didn't know that" collection of lessons about the female body, and to a large extent bodies in general.

Each essay conveys her own battles, mostly internally, with some aspect of inhabiting a body that is only partially under her control. Once the stage is set she shares the results of the research she did, mostly interviews with experts. The key to the success of these essays is the way in which she moves smoothly into the research portion without leaving behind the personal aspects. Her comments about what an expert says helps keep in our minds that this is about living comfortably in our bodies and not simply a collection of interesting facts and research. That grounding in the personal is where this volume excels.

I would recommend this to anyone who would genuinely like to know some whys and hows of our bodily functions. Presented both humorously and compassionately, Altman makes these usually unmentionable topics prime fodder for your next dinner party, well, maybe after the meal has been completed.

Reviewed from a copy made available through Goodreads First Reads.

Melinda Lewis says

I underlined so many things

Craig Amason says

If we trust that Altman is being completely honest with her readers, we have to sympathize with her to some degree. She has inherited or contracted an impressive number of "problems" that are considered among the most embarrassing for women in American society: lice, facial hair, heavy perspiration, warts, vaginal odor, hemorrhoids, and the list goes on. She also discusses social expectations for women about their bodies that she is curious about or struggles with including covering breasts in public, leg hair, pubic hair, birth marks, and more. She is a comic writer, and it is clear that she wants us to laugh at her "misery." I laughed out loud several times. She really is funny. If we don't take her too seriously, this is an entertaining look at how women conform to some ridiculous, unreasonable expectations and double standards imposed by American culture.

Sue Williams says

I loved this book. It certainly isn't your everyday anatomy book. Mara Altman seems to have always had a love-hate relationship with her body and a massively large helping of curiosity. She just didn't accept the fact that certain parts of the female body are problematic, she picked a problem area, such as stinky armpits, and hunted down people she thought could help her understand armpit stink. She always talked to at least two experts who were studying armpit stink from different perspectives. She didn't fool around. She wanted information so she could decide if she was dealing with the problem properly, at least for her. Seriously, she has put inordinate amount of time and effort into finding out the why and wherefore of the problem parts of the female body. She is self deprecating and does it with her wonderful dry sense of humor. You will find out by reading this book, things you never thought about. With Mara Altman's storytelling ability, she could explain the sex life of a fly and make it fascinating, or at least interesting.

I would really like to get to know her.

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Katie Palazzolo says

This was actually really good and enlightening. I learned a lot and came away feeling so much more comfortable with my weird body

I am of the camp that does the bare minimum to maintain femininity (as expected by society, including not shaving my legs or wearing makeup, etc.) Why should I do those things? And why do I feel so weird, defiant, and outcast if I don't?

Mara has the same questions and has taken steps to find answers, and the historical and cultural context behind them. The chapter on butts and hemorrhoids is my favorite; the one on passing out/fainting is my least favorite (although it is arguably the most relevant to me) and all include delightful and very real commentary on the various body parts that make up our meat sack.

Janice says

Yes, GROSS ANATOMY was gross. However, it was also very entertaining and informative.

I received the book as a Goodreads Giveaway.

Carrie says

I won this book from Goodreads Giveaways. Thank you.

What a fun mix of humor and science.

Ashley Holstrom says

To be a complete woman, I felt as though I had to get rid of a part of myself. But why? Why does there have to be all this shame and angst about something that's a natural part of being woman? The pressure to be hairless has driven me to feel like I have to hide something from my fiancé, to spend thousands of dollars, to feel less worthy than my female peers.

I did not expect to learn SO much about the body, but here I am. Mara Altman takes a very Mary Roach approach to the questions she has about the body — why do women have to shave their bodies? Why do dogs like sniffing crotches? What makes people faint? — and hunts down experts to answer those questions for her. And she's hilarious. I love it so much.

Lori Tatar says

Hilarious self-deprecating humor backed by scientific facts most of the time and strong professional opinions based on scientific research, make this a tremendously humorous and honest look at women's bodies, issues and the stigmas that surround the feminine. This is a favorite and I already have friends and family lining up to read it. I also want to mention that the illustrations add to the laughter!

Katya Kazbek says

I translated this into Russian and grew into one with the gross, hysterical tangle that this book is, so I may be biased. But it's fantastic. Mara is a very relatable neurotic with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. So, the best kind of person. I am literally walking around sermonizing from this book to my beloveds about the right

ways of pooping, or how women have been abused by the ad-people for over a century. Oh, and how many discomfoting Medieval and Ancient Greek health anecdotes I now have for small talk at parties!

I can't stress enough how important having a book like this is in Russia, where nobody even owns a hand mirror, the sexual revolution of the 60s never happened, and books which casually mention a woman and her wife are absolutely alien—all while body shaming is rampant. So Mara's no nonsense approach to the corporeal is a beacon of light. But even for those of us tucked away safely in the Western comforts and seemingly in balance with themselves, this book will be very helpful. It literally teaches you to tolerate and appreciate sweat, long labia and chin hair, as parts of our beautiful—and super gross, and messy—humanity.

PS: And of course I basically screamed at my computer when reading the Barstool Sports guy compare Pete Davidson's eyes to buttoholes, while mentioning that buttoholes are brown because they stain. "Read Mara, you idiot!" Mara cures of such ignorance.

Amber Machado says

! So witty and comically right! Women feel as if they have to give up something to be accepted! She discussed things about the female body that women are ashamed to talk about usually.

Kelly says

A wildly engaging and funny look at all of the parts of being a human in a human body in the Western world that too often, we ignore, laugh about, or pretend are things we don't have to deal with. Altman is smart and curious and asks lots of great questions to professionals to find answers to her questions about everything from pooping to chin hair to warts and PMS.

This has been described like Mary Roach but with more humor, and this is a great description. At times, the essays are a little long and the humor relies on some easy and lazy reaches (I cringed a couple of times from the writing, like when Mara mentions being a "chubby-chaser") but it's so minimal in the grand scheme of a fascinating book. It's a book that never explores the human body in a way that's meant to make you think it's gross. It's meant to remind you it is what it is and it is absolutely fascinating. And we still know so little.

Big takeaways for me: how and where douche as an insult came to be and why it's misogynist, the idea that PMS might be a sign of your need to practice better self-care, and that there are smarter ways to poop that rely on abdomen pressure (it's not gross -- we all do it and also, it's a nice complement to the knowledge I got from teaching yoga about how to get one's body moving when everything's feeling all blocked up).

Petra X says

The author has assumed that "more is better" and not left a single factoid, supposition, thesis, experience or even what someone once said to her about whatever out. It's making me wonder if she is paid per word. I'm skimming, always a bad sign.

