



Sex and sexual health



Thinking about having sex?

Having sex is a big step. It's important you feel in control and make decisions that are right for you. Sometimes it can help to talk it through with someone first. You may want to get advice from someone you trust, such as a friend, family member or teacher. Your general practitioner (GP) or a family planning clinic can also give you information about sexual health, contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and blood born viruses (BBV's) such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).



What is sexual health and sexuality?

Sexual health includes avoiding things like STIs and unplanned pregnancies, but it also includes feeling good about who you are attracted to, and the decisions you make around sexual activity. Sexual health is something that we all need to think and talk about, regardless of our gender or sexuality.

Sexuality is the nature of a person's basic sexual attraction to other people (e.g. straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual). It is important to remember that not everyone is straight or heterosexual and that this is completely natural and normal. If you have any questions about your sexuality you may like to talk to someone you trust or a counsellor.

Are you ready for sex?



Sex can be enjoyable with the right person, but it's very easy to make mistakes and end up hurt. Sex can sometimes change relationships or leave you feeling different emotionally.

So how do you know when you're ready? Legally you aren't allowed to have sex with anyone until you're over the age of consent but it takes more than just being a legal age to make you ready for sex. You need to be emotionally ready and sex needs to be consensual – in other words, you both want to have sex. Keep yourself out of trouble by checking that you both feel comfortable with and understand the decisions you have made. Make sure you are aware of the law in your state about the age of consent by checking out www.lawstuff.org.au.

If you are considering having sex, ask yourself the following questions:

Are you doing this because you want to? Be sure that it is something that you want to do. You should not have sex because someone wants you to or because your friends are encouraging you to.

Do we both want this? You may decide that you are ready to have sex but it might be that someone else isn't; even if they have had sex before. Don't ever pressure anyone to have sex if they're not sure. Having sex with someone without their consent is against the law, it is rape.

Do I feel safe? Having sex with someone you trust is going to make it a much better experience. Sex can leave you feeling vulnerable and you want to feel safe and be able to talk about your feelings.

Do I feel comfortable talking about sex and contraception? It's important that you feel comfortable and safe talking

about sex and contraception. Being prepared is smart and shows you have respect for someone else but most importantly, for yourself.

Do I feel comfortable having sex with someone sober?

If you feel like you might need to drink alcohol or take drugs before sex then it's probably not the right time, or perhaps they are not the right person. Young people who mix alcohol, drugs and sex are more likely to regret their decisions and are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours, like not using appropriate protection¹.

Do I know how to have sex safely?

Making an informed choice is really important with most things in life. Get some information, speak to your GP, a counsellor or someone you trust about how to keep safe and protect yourself from STIs and unintended pregnancy.

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

STIs are passed on during sex (i.e. vaginal, oral and anal) through blood, semen or vaginal fluids and include chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital herpes and warts. Most signs or symptoms of having an STI are not obvious so a person can have an STI without knowing it. The best way to detect an STI is to get tested (see 'Getting tested' section).

Protection such as condoms and dental dams are methods that can reduce the risk of most STIs but they need to be used correctly.



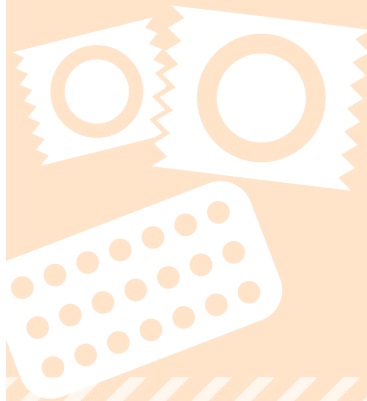
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Negotiating condom use

Negotiating the use of a condom needs to start before you get to the bedroom (or wherever you may be having sex). It starts with being prepared, having condoms, knowing how to use them and knowing how to talk about safer sex before you start sexual activities. You may want to practice how you would have a conversation about condom use.

Carrying a condom and knowing how to use it does not mean you are 'easy' or necessarily an expert at sex, it just means you respect yourself and therefore are more likely to respect others. If you are unsure about how to correctly put on a condom don't be afraid to search online or ask someone you trust.



Contraception is the use of methods to prevent unintended pregnancy, and when used properly, can be very effective. There are many forms of contraception. Condoms are the only form of contraception which protect against both pregnancy and STIs.

The most well-known method of contraception is the contraceptive pill, where females are able to take a hormonal pill daily to prevent pregnancy, but it does not protect against STIs. Other options include the female condom, contraceptive injections and a diaphragm. Contraception can also be implanted under the skin of your arm or an Intra Uterine Device (IUD), which is inserted into the uterus by a GP.

There are many different types of the same contraception too, so if you are considering your options, your GP or **headspace** is a safe place to start discussing your choices.

It is important to remember that no contraceptive is one hundred per cent effective. There is always a very small chance of pregnancy. Doubling up and using a hormonal contraceptive and a condom is the safest option to prevent unintended pregnancy. If you are worried that you may be pregnant because you recently had unprotected sex you can speak to a health professional about the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP).

Same Sex Attracted (SSA)



The importance of practising safer sex is just as relevant for everyone regardless of gender or sexuality. Even though sexual contact that does not involve any blood, semen or vaginal fluids being passed between partners minimises the risk that you will get an STI or BBV, nothing is ever one hundred per cent risk free.

Sexual activity between women has a lower risk of STI transmission, however lower risk does not mean there is no

risk at all. It is still possible for two women to pass infections on to one another if one person is infected. It is recommended that women who engage in sexual activity with other women should still take the same precautions as straight people by using appropriate protection.

Men who have sex with men are at increased likelihood of getting an STI², however, if used correctly condoms can dramatically reduce the risk.

Getting tested

If you are sexually active you should get tested for STI's once a year, even if you use protection. This can be done as part of a routine GP visit or at **headspace** – just say "I want an STI test". Testing is confidential (it is only between you and the health professional) and is often at a low cost to young people.

Getting tested may involve taking some of your blood, peeing in a cup, or an

examination of your sexual organs. GPs are professionals at this and likely do sexual health checks multiple times a day – so there is no need to be embarrassed. You will then get the results of your tests a few weeks later.



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National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

References: ¹Agius et al. (2013), Excessive alcohol use and its association with risky sexual behavior: A cross-sectional analysis from Victorian Secondary Schools. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. 37(1), 76-82. ²Templeton et al. (2014). Australian sexually transmissible infection and HIV testing guidelines for asymptomatic men who have sex with men 2014: a review of the evidence. *Sexual Health* 11(3) 217-229 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/SH14003>.

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