

Sexual Health



Introduction

When people talk about 'sexual health' they are talking about the best ways to look after yourself when you are having sex or exploring sexually. Sexual health also includes the ability to express and explore your sexuality, have relationships and safe sexual experiences that are free from sexually transmissible infections (STIs), unplanned pregnancy, violence and discrimination. Looking after your sexual health includes contraception (for types of sex that can result in pregnancy), getting sexual health check-ups (STI tests) and everything in between.

Sex and sexual exploration

The basics

Knowing about your sexual health helps you make informed and healthy choices and to feel safe and comfortable in your body when you're thinking about or planning to have sex or are already having sex.

Sexual health includes things like using contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancy, knowing about the risks of sexual activity and how to protect yourself from those risks, seeing a doctor or nurse for check-ups, and when testing for STIs and knowing about consent and your personal boundaries and rights.

What is sex and what is sexual activity?

Sex, or sexual activity/sexual intercourse, refers to any activity that involves sexual contact that may induce arousal and make you feel good. Sex isn't a 'one size fits all.' What feels good to you might not be right for someone else. Everyone is different when it comes to sexual behaviours and desires.

Most commonly, sex or sexual intercourse, describes sexual activity where a penis, finger, or object (for example, a sex toy) is partially or fully inside another person's vagina, anus (bottom) or mouth. A person can have sex by themselves (using sex toys or masturbating), between two people, or in a group.

Some common kinds of sexual activity include:

- penetrative sex - when a person puts their penis, fingers or another object inside another person's vagina or anus.
- anal sex is when an object or penis is inserted into the anus (bottom) during sex. It can range from just touching the outside of the anus with a finger or toy to inserting fingers, sex toys or a penis into the anus.
- oral sex is the sexual stimulation of the genitals and/or anus using the mouth and tongue.
- sexual activity that involves touching - like touching someone's genitals, anus, or breasts over the clothes or under the clothes. For example, stroking, grabbing, hand jobs or fingering, and kissing
- sexual activity that doesn't involve touching - like masturbating in front of another person, sending or receiving sexual pictures or videos (nudes or sexting), or encouraging a person to do a sexual act.

All these things are types of sexual activity. The important thing is that everyone feels safe and that consent is given freely.

Consent is non-negotiable in sexual situations. This means you MUST have a CLEAR yes from the other person BEFORE you do anything sexual - every time.

What is consent?

Consent is when one person gives permission to another person to do something. This can be verbally or through positive body language. Both people should know what is going to happen and also know that they have the option to say 'no' or to change their mind later on.

When it comes to sex, sexual consent is an agreement where people enthusiastically and voluntarily give permission for any type of sexual activity.

Body language can be a useful tool to reinforce consent, but cannot legally be relied upon as a form of consent.

If someone is asleep, unconscious, drunk or on drugs then they cannot consent. You cannot pressure someone into giving consent. Pressuring or making someone do something they do not want to do is sexual assault. Sexual assault is a crime.

For more information on consent and tips on how to ask for consent see our [Consent](#) topic.

Pleasure and talking (for sex with another person)

Sex should feel good and be something that you enjoy, either by yourself or with a partner(s). Sex is a natural part of sexuality and there is no shame in healthy sexual desire or sexual needs.

Talking to your sexual partner(s) about what you both like and are comfortable doing is a big part of making it enjoyable for both of you.

Check in with each other about what you're doing before and while you're doing it.

You can ask 'do you like this', 'could we try this?', or 'what do you like?/ what feels good for you?'.

Mutual pleasure, meaning that you are both giving and receiving pleasure, is something that you can explore together.

Talk about how you will protect your sexual health. Like what type of contraception you will be using and what you will do if something goes wrong (like if a condom breaks) and when you both had your last sexual health check-up.

Remember, it's okay to say 'no' at any time. If you ever feel uncomfortable or decide that you don't want to keep going, say 'no' at any point. This is your right, and it is a crime for someone to keep going after you have said no.

[Reach Out](#) have a safe sex guide that talks about what you need to know about making safe decisions about sex.

[Play Safe](#) has more information on exploring sex.

Safe Sex

When we talk about safe sex, we usually think of the four C's: Consent, Condoms, Contraception and Communication. Understanding each different component is important and will help to make sure you have a safe and enjoyable sex life.

Safe sex:

- is consensual.
- uses condoms to prevent most sexually transmissible infections (STIs).
- uses contraception when needed to prevent unplanned pregnancies.
- always prioritises communication before, during and after sex.

It is also important to know that safe sex can include the use of PrEP and PEP (these help to prevent HIV which is a blood-borne virus). Whether you are sexually active or not, it's important to look after your physical, mental and sexual health at all times.



Sexual Health Check-ups

Getting a sexual health check-up is a normal part of having a healthy sex life.

If you are having sex, health professionals recommend that you get a sexual health check up:

- at least once a year when you are sexually active
- if you have had unprotected sex (e.g. not using a condom or if the condom breaks)
- if you, or the person you had sex with, has multiple sexual partners
- if you are having sex with a new sexual partner
- or if you think you might have a [sexually transmissible infection \(STI\)](#)- you might have symptoms like genital discharge and/or itching, pain when you pass urine or during sex, or pain in the lower abdomen.

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) can be passed from person to person during sexual activity with someone who already has an STI.

Some of these infections can be passed on by skin-to-skin contact (e.g. herpes or HPV), while others are only transmitted if there has been penetration and sharing of body fluids such as semen and vaginal fluid, (eg. chlamydia). Many STIs have no signs or symptoms so you may not know if you or your partner have one until you get an STI test.

Most doctors can give you a sexual health check-up or you can visit a youth or sexual health clinic too.

Remember, it is your responsibility to keep your body healthy and to make sure you are not passing on an STI to another sexual partner.

You can ask to see a male, female or other gendered doctor - if you have particular needs or want to speak about specific topics you can look for a doctor who works specifically with your needs (some doctors have experience with LGBTIQ+, disability or young people) - whoever you feel most comfortable with.

What happens when you get a sexual health check-up?

Sexual health check-ups are an important part of being sexually active. You should get regular check-ups to keep yourself and your sexual partners safe and well.

Sexual health check-ups are a regular part of a doctor and nurses' jobs. They aren't embarrassed - they do it every day!

It's a great opportunity to talk to the doctor or nurse about anything else you want to know about, like contraceptives, enjoying sex, or any tricky questions you might have.

While it may be awkward to get tested (especially the first time) it gets easier and is a lot better than leaving it. It is important to know about and treat STIs, to avoid any long-term impacts on your health and the health of your sexual partners.

To decide what type of tests you might need, the doctor will ask you about your general health, your sex life and sexual partners, any symptoms you might have,

and any medication you might be taking.

These questions can feel very personal, but everybody is asked these questions and they are a normal part of the process so the doctor or nurse can figure out what tests you need.

Your information is not shared with anyone else, including your sexual partner, family or guardian/s, unless the doctor feels like you might be in danger or have been sexually assaulted. If you're worried about your privacy visit [Your rights at the doctor](#) health topic or [Youth Law Australia](#).

STI tests are easy, confidential and nothing to be ashamed about. STIs are tested for by a urine sample and a self-collected swab or a blood test. The doctor or nurse will always ask for your permission before asking you to do a test.

For more information:

- check out [PlaySafe's](#) latest factsheet on getting a sexual health check.
- for a confidential chat, call the [Sexual Health Info link](#) for more information on STIs, HIV or sexual health checks or to find your closest location.
- visit [ReachOut's](#) website for more information about talking to someone about sexual health or sexual health check ups.
- Speak to [Nurse Nettie](#), a qualified sexual health nurse. You can ask Nurse Nettie anything about sex, relationships or sexual health.

Where to get tested?

You can get an STI test at your local doctor, a sexual health clinic and at some university health clinics. Call the NSW Sexual Health Infolink on 1800 451 624 to find a location near you. Make sure you ask the clinic if they bulk bill, or if there will be any costs for your appointment.

- [NSW Health](#) has a list of Sexual Health Clinics in NSW, including Aboriginal Medical Services.
- [ReachOut](#) has a list of Multicultural Sexual Health Services.
- [ACON](#) has sexual health testing information for the [LGBTIQ+](#) community.

Contraception

Contraception is an important part of having a healthy sex life.

Using contraception allows you to have sex while preventing an unplanned pregnancy. Many different methods of contraception are available. It's important to discuss contraception with a new partner before you decide to have sex. Contraception affects both you and your partner, so you are both responsible for it.

Not everyone will need to think about contraception as not all types of sex can result in pregnancy. The type of contraception you use is your choice.

Condoms are an important way to prevent STIs, but they do not provide 100% protection against pregnancy. It's always best to wear a condom as well as using another contraceptive method to protect yourself from both STI's and unplanned pregnancy.

If you're unsure about what type of contraception is best for you, you can visit a sexual health clinic, speak to your doctor or contact sexual health services online or over the phone. You can contact [Family Planning Australia](#) Talkline to chat with someone or go to [Contraception.org](#) where you can do a contraception quiz to find the best contraception for you.

There are many types of contraception available.

The type of contraception you use is your choice. Your doctor can help you understand the benefits and side-effects of each option. There are three main 'types' of contraception:

- Hormonal contraception, like the pill, uses hormones such as oestrogen and progestogen to make changes to the body to prevent pregnancy.
- Barrier methods, like male (external) and female (internal) condoms, stop the transfer of bodily fluids.
- Other methods, like the withdrawal method, do not involve hormones or barriers to stop the transfer of bodily fluids and are usually much less effective.

Condoms are the only type of contraception that will protect you from pregnancy and STIs. For more information on contraception, or to talk about your options, you can chat with your local doctor or call Family Planning Australia's Talkline.

Common types of contraception include:

- [External condoms](#) - effective against STI's and pregnancy
- [Internal condoms](#) - effective against STI's
- [Contraceptive pill 'The pill'](#) - effective against pregnancy only
- [Contraceptive implant](#) - effective against pregnancy only
- [Hormonal Intra Uterine Device](#) - effective against pregnancy only
- [Copper Intra Uterine Device](#) - effective against pregnancy only

You can also take the '[Find your perfect Contraception](#)' Quiz here.

Emergency contraception

You may have recently had unprotected sex or you used a condom that broke or slipped off. There are two types of emergency contraception available:

- [Emergency contraception pill](#)

The 'morning after pill' (LNG-ECP) is an emergency contraceptive pill that is taken as soon as you can after you've had unprotected sex. The pill must be taken within 72 hours (three days) of having sex and is available from pharmacies without a prescription. The pharmacist will ask you a few questions like why you need emergency contraception, the number of hours since you last had unprotected sex, and information about your period. The sooner you take the pill the more effective they are. The emergency contraception pill usually costs around \$40.

The 'EllaOne' (UPA) is an emergency contraceptive pill that can be taken up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex. It is available at pharmacies or from a doctor without a prescription.

It is important to remember that emergency contraceptive pills become less effective the longer you wait. You should take them as soon as you can after unprotected sex. They do not protect from STI's and should not be used as a

replacement for other contraceptives like condoms.

If you need to find out more about different types of emergency contraception you can contact [Family Planning Australia](#).

For more information about contraception:

- [BodyTalk](#) has an online guide about the different types of contraception,
- [PlaySafe](#) has information about visiting a doctor for contraception methods,
- [International Student Health Hub](#) for common questions and answers about sexual health, contraception and pregnancy.
- [Reach Out](#) have information about the costs and effectiveness of different types of contraception,
- [EndingHIV](#) has information on how to access FREE condoms in NSW,
- [Contraception.org](#) have more information on all types of contraception.
- [Freedmon Condom](#) is a friendly, confidential way for young people to access free condoms, lube and sexual health information.