TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

What you need to know about preventive services

NATIONAL COALITION FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

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What's in this Guide?

- **Action steps for achieving good sexual health**
- **Information on recommended sexual health services for men and women**
- **Tips on how to talk with a health care provider**
- **Resources on sexual health topics**

This guide informs men and women of all ages, including teens and older adults, about sexual health. It focuses on the preventive services (screenings, vaccines, and counseling) that can help protect and improve your sexual health. The guide explains these recommended services and helps you find and talk with a health care provider.

CONTENTS

SEXUAL HEALTH AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT 2

WHAT ARE PREVENTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES? 3

WHAT SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES DO WOMEN NEED? 4

WHAT SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES DO MEN NEED? 9

WHAT TYPES OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ADDRESS SEXUAL HEALTH? 13

TALKING WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH 14

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SEXUAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDER 16

WHERE TO LEARN MORE 18

What is Sexual Health and How Do I Achieve it?

A healthier body. A satisfying sex life. Valuing and feeling good about yourself. Having peace of mind. Positive and satisfying relationships. Avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies. These are just a few of the important benefits of good sexual health. Being sexually healthy means being able to enjoy a healthier body, a satisfying sexual life, positive relationships, and peace of mind. It also means enjoying your sexuality and taking care of yourself and your partners throughout your life. Being free to talk about sexual health with your partner and health care provider is key to your health.

ACTION STEPS TO GOOD SEXUAL HEALTH

There are five key steps you can take to help you achieve good sexual health. These steps apply regardless of your age or the relationships you choose to have:

- **Value who you are and decide what's right for you**
- **Get smart about your body and protect it**
- **Treat your partners well and expect them to treat you well**
- **Build positive relationships**
- **Make sexual health part of your health care routine**

Value who you are and decide what's right for you. Sex is a natural part of life; it can bring you pleasure, intimacy, and joy. But it is up to you to decide if and when you choose to have sex. First, think about what you want, and define your personal values, desires, and boundaries. These might change depending on your stage in life.

Get smart about your body and protect it. Learn about your body and how it works, and explore ways to express yourself sexually. Practice safer sex to protect yourself and your partners from many STIs and unplanned pregnancies. Condoms can prevent both STIs and unplanned pregnancies, while other contraceptives only prevent pregnancy. For extra protection, some people choose to use condoms, along with another contraceptive method.

Treat your partners well and expect them to treat you well. Be with someone who makes you feel good about yourself, comfortable and safe. Partners should respect your boundaries, and should not pressure or force you to do something you don't want to. Likewise, respect your partner and don't force them to do anything they don't want to.

Build positive relationships by having open and honest conversations about your relationship, desires, and sexual health. Respect each other and make decisions together. If health problems come up, discuss them openly and seek medical care. If your partner is violent, or pressures or tries to control you, seek help from your health care provider or an organization that addresses partner violence.

Make sexual health part of your health care routine, which will help protect your sexual health and well-being. Find a health care provider who makes you feel comfortable and respects you. You have a right to good medical care. Have open conversations with your provider about how to stay healthy and any other issues that affect your sexual health. Wellness check-ups are a good time to get recommended services, ask questions, or share any concerns about your sexual health, including sexual performance and functioning.

It's time to give sexual health the attention it deserves. To learn more go to www.NCSHguide.org

What are Preventive Sexual Health Services?

A range of preventive sexual health services is available to help you stay healthy and detect and treat any problems early. These services are recommended by many leading medical organizations.*

Most of these services are now available at no cost under the new health reform law, but check with your insurer to make sure your health plan covers them. Low-cost or free services might also be available at community health centers and family planning clinics. See the ***Where to Learn More*** chapter to help you find a provider or nearby clinic.

Preventive services include:

- ***Screenings*** that test for sexually transmitted infections or diseases, whether or not you have symptoms
- ***Vaccines***, such as the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which decreases your risk of getting the virus that causes genital warts, cervical cancer and some other cancers (anal, oral, and penile)
- ***Counseling*** to help you make healthy decisions. For example, you can learn about the best ways to protect yourself and your partner from getting sexually transmitted infections

A NOTE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

If you are covered by your parent's or partner's health insurance, keep in mind that a list of the health care services you receive might appear on their routine insurance statements. Ask your health care provider if the sexual health care services you are getting will be reported, and make sure you are comfortable with their policy.

* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, and other national organizations recommend these services

What Sexual Health Services do Women Need?

The following preventive services are recommended for most women. Your provider will help you decide which ones you need. Even if you don't have symptoms, screenings can detect many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you do have an STI, the sooner you get treated, the better. Early treatment can often prevent serious problems from developing. Vaccines are also available that can protect you from getting certain STIs. You can receive many of these services during a regular wellness exam or a Well Woman visit.

SCREENINGS

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

All sexually active women aged 24 and younger should be screened annually for chlamydia and gonorrhea. Women aged 25 and older who have risk factors for STIs, such as having unprotected sex (sex without a condom), a new partner, or multiple partners, should also be screened for both chlamydia and gonorrhea.

Talk to your provider about being screened for syphilis. You may need to be screened if you have multiple partners, have HIV, have exchanged sex for money or drugs, or been in prison.

All pregnant women should be screened for chlamydia, syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis B during their first prenatal visit or within the first trimester. Pregnant women aged 24 and younger, as well as older women with risk factors for STIs, should also be screened for gonorrhea. Those who are at continued risk for STIs should be retested for chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV in their third trimester.

HIV Testing

You should be tested for HIV at least once as part of your routine health care, even if you think your partner only has sex with you. You should also be tested if you aren't currently having sex, but you have had sex in the past.

You should be tested at least once a year if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has, have multiple partners, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Most women aged 21-65 should have a Pap test every three years. You may need to be screened more often if you've had an abnormal result. If so, talk with your provider. The Pap test looks for cells on a woman's cervix that could become cancer. **A Pap test alone does not test for STIs, nor does it test for other cancers of the reproductive system.**

Some women over age 30 can safely go up to five years between cervical cancer screenings. To do so, ask your provider to also test you for HPV (human papillomavirus). The cells collected for the Pap test will also be tested for HPV. If it shows that you don't have HPV and you have a history of normal Pap tests, you can go five years between screenings.

Even though you may not need annual screening, you should still see your provider regularly for checkups. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm

WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN

If you are a woman who has sex with women, you still need many of these preventive services. You can get chlamydia, gonorrhea, HPV, and other sexually transmitted infections from your female partners. You also need to be tested for HIV, especially if you or your partners had sex with men in the past or still do. The HPV vaccine will help protect you from getting cervical cancer, which is caused by the human papillomavirus.

Hepatitis B Screening

You should be screened for hepatitis B if you are pregnant, have a partner who has hepatitis B, have multiple partners, have had an STI, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or live with a person who is infected with the hepatitis B virus. You should also be screened if you were born in a country where hepatitis B infection is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick, but can still infect others. Chronic hepatitis B infection can often be treated, but not cured. To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/B.

Hepatitis C Screening

All women born between 1945 and 1965 should be screened once for hepatitis C. Many "baby boomers" have hepatitis C and don't know it. They may have engaged in risky behaviors or received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before national screening for the virus was in place. Most people become infected with hepatitis C by sharing drug injection equipment. If you inject illegal drugs, you should be screened periodically for hepatitis C. You should also be screened if you've been in prison, have HIV, or have ever injected illegal drugs.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from having unprotected sex is low, but it is possible. You are at higher risk if you have HIV or another STI, have multiple partners, or engage in rough sex.

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause severe illness and permanent liver damage. However, it can often be cured, especially if the infection is detected early. To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm.

Intimate Partner Violence

If your partner is sexually, verbally, or physically abusing you, or forcing you to do things against your will (such as get pregnant, not use birth control, or engage in unsafe sex), speak up and let your provider know. They can refer you to a program or mental health professional who can help you.

VACCINES

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

This series of three shots is recommended for girls aged 11-12 before they've been exposed to HPV, but may be given up to age 26. Some women over age 26 may also benefit from being vaccinated. Talk to your provider to see if you're eligible.

HPV is extremely common. Although most infections go away on their own, some types of HPV cause cancer (mainly cervical, but also anal, vaginal, vulvar, and oral) and other types cause genital warts.

Two different vaccines (Cervarix and Gardasil) are available that can protect girls and women from the types of HPV that cause cancer. However, only Gardasil protects against both cancer and genital warts. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

This three-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated teens. Teens who have started, but not finished, the series should get the remaining doses in order to be fully protected against the hepatitis B virus. Unvaccinated women should get this vaccine series if they have multiple partners, a partner who has hepatitis B, have been diagnosed with HIV or another STI, have unprotected sex with a partner whose health status they don't know, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who injects drugs.

If you were born in a country where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries, talk to your provider about being vaccinated. You may be given the first dose and tested for the virus at the same time.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick, but can still infect others. Vaccination is the best protection against hepatitis B. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? If you were born in the United States in 1991 or later, you were most likely vaccinated as an infant. Before 1991, the vaccine was only given to high-risk adults.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

This two-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated teens. Teens who are missing the last dose should complete the series in order to be fully protected against hepatitis A. Women should get this vaccine series if their partner or someone they live with has hepatitis A, or if they use illicit drugs.

The hepatitis A virus attacks the liver. There is no treatment for hepatitis A. While most people recover without permanent liver damage, they will probably feel very sick for a while. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? Routine vaccination began in 1999 so older teens and most adults have not been vaccinated. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/aFAQ.htm.

How Do I Know if I'm at Risk?

Your sexual health is at risk if you answer "yes" to any of the following questions::

- Have you had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)?
- Do you have multiple partners?
- Do you have an STI, including HIV?
- Have you shared injection drug equipment, including needles or syringes?
- Do you exchange sex for drugs or money?
- Do you have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know?

COUNSELING

Contraception

Talk with your provider about your plans for having, or not having, children. He or she can then provide information on the best contraceptive methods for you. Long-acting reversible contraceptives - the intrauterine device (IUD) and the implant - are among the easiest and most reliable methods for all women who want to prevent pregnancy. Other available methods include injections, birth control pills, the vaginal ring, the patch, diaphragm, sponge, cervical cap, and male and female condoms. Condoms are the only contraceptive method that prevent both pregnancy and STIs. If you're done having children or know you don't want any, permanent contraception (e.g., tubal ligation) may be right for you. Natural family planning methods and abstinence (not having sex) are other options.

Your provider can also tell you about emergency contraception (EC), or the "morning after pill." EC can prevent pregnancy if taken within a few days of having unprotected sex. EC is available to anyone without a prescription at family planning clinics and pharmacies.

STI Prevention

Using a male or female condom every time you have sex is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of getting many STIs, including HIV. Other effective ways to protect yourself include abstinence (not having sex) or only having one partner who you know does not have an STI. If you have sex without a condom, have an STI or recently had one, or have a new partner and are unsure of their health status, talk to your provider or a health educator. They can counsel you on ways to protect yourself and your partner from STIs, including whether medicines to prevent HIV infection are right for you. People who do not have HIV but are at high risk of becoming infected can stay healthy by taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) might be prescribed if you think you've been exposed to HIV. Also, consult the resources at the end of this guide for more information about preventing STIs.

IT'S YOUR BODY!

You know your body better than anyone. Always tell your health care provider about any changes in your health. Speak to them about any concerns you may have about conditions, diseases, or issues related to sexual functioning or performance.

RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR WOMEN

Sexual Health Service	Adolescent (13-18 years)	Adult (19+)
Cervical cancer screening	Not recommended	Those aged 21-29 every 3 years Those aged 30-65 every 3-5 years
Chlamydia screening	Those who are sexually active (screen annually) or pregnant	Those aged 24 and under (screen annually) Those over age 24 who are at risk Those who are pregnant
Contraceptive counseling	Those who are sexually active	Those who are sexually active and/or of childbearing age
Counseling to prevent sexually transmitted infections	Those who are sexually active	Those who are at risk
Gonorrhea screening	Those who are sexually active or pregnant	Those aged 24 and under (screen annually), including those who are pregnant Those over age 24 who are at risk, including those who are pregnant
Hepatitis A vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated
Hepatitis B vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis B screening	Those who are pregnant Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common	Those who are pregnant Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis C screening	Not recommended	Those born between 1945 and 1965 Injection drug users
HIV testing	Those who are or have been sexually active (test at least once) Those who are pregnant	Those who are or have been sexually active (test at least once) Those who are at risk (test at least annually) Those who are pregnant
HPV vaccine	Those not vaccinated at age 11 or 12	May be given through age 26 (and to eligible adults over age 26)
Syphilis screening	Those who are pregnant or at risk	Those who are pregnant or at risk

You're at risk if you have had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom), have multiple partners, have an STI (including HIV), share injection drug equipment (including needles or syringes), exchange sex for drugs or money, or have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know.

What Sexual Health Services do Men Need?

The following preventive services are recommended for most men. Your provider will help you decide which ones you need. Even if you don't have symptoms, screenings can detect many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you do have an STI, the sooner you get treated, the better. Early treatment can often prevent serious problems from developing. Vaccines are also available that can protect you from getting certain STIs.

SCREENINGS

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Men who have sex only with women: You might consider being screened for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis if you have unprotected sex, have multiple partners, or have a new partner and do not know her health status, even if you do not have any symptoms.

Men who have sex with men: If you are sexually active, you should be screened at least once a year for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Men who have sex with men often have chlamydia and gonorrhea infections in their rectums and throats but don't know it. Depending on the kinds of sex you have, you may need additional screening to find these infections. You should be screened every 3-6 months if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has, have multiple partners, use illicit drugs, or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

HIV Testing

Men who have sex only with women: You should be tested for HIV at least once as part of your routine health care, even if you think your partner only has sex with you. You should also be tested if you aren't currently having sex, but you have had sex in the past. You should be tested at least once a year if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has, have multiple partners, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

Men who have sex with men: You should be tested for HIV at least once a year. You should be tested every 3-6 months if you have unprotected sex, have multiple partners, use illicit drugs, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

Hepatitis B Screening

Regular screening for hepatitis B is recommended for men who have sex with men and those who share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), especially if they have not been vaccinated. If you have a partner or family member who has hepatitis B, have multiple partners, or have had an STI, you should be screened as well. Others who should be screened include those who were born in a country where hepatitis B infection is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick, but can still infect others. Chronic hepatitis B infection can often be treated, but not cured. To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm.

Hepatitis C Screening

All men born between 1945 and 1965 should be screened once for hepatitis C. Many "baby boomers" have hepatitis C and don't know it. They may have engaged in risky behaviors or received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before national screening for the virus was in place. Most people become infected with hepatitis C by sharing drug injection equipment, including needles or syringes. If you inject illegal drugs, you should be screened periodically for hepatitis C. You should also be screened if you've been in prison, have HIV, or have ever injected illegal drugs.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from having unprotected sex is low, but it is still possible. Men who have sex with men and have multiple partners and/or engage in unprotected rough

sex (specifically sex that can result in bleeding) are at higher risk.

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause severe illness and permanent liver damage. However, it can often be cured, especially if the infection is detected early. To learn more, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm.

Intimate Partner Violence

If your partner frequently threatens you, constantly accuses you of doing something you didn't, tries to control what you do or where you go, refuses to have safe sex, or hits, slaps or kicks you, talk to a health professional. Although your provider will probably not ask you about abuse in your relationships, if you let them know they can refer you to programs that can help you.

VACCINES

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

This series of three shots is recommended for boys aged 11 or 12, before they have been exposed to HPV. If not vaccinated as a teen, all males through age 21 should get the HPV vaccine. All men who have sex with men and those with compromised immune systems (including HIV) should be vaccinated and can do so up to age 26. If you are between the ages of 22 and 26, talk to your provider about being vaccinated. Gardasil (the HPV vaccine for boys and young men) protects against the most common types of HPV that cause genital warts and some cancers of the anus and throat. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

This three-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated teens. Teens who have started, but not finished, the series should get the remaining doses in order to be fully protected against the hepatitis B virus. All unvaccinated men should get this vaccine series if they have sex with men, have multiple partners, have a partner who has hepatitis B, have been diagnosed with HIV or another STI, have unprotected sex with a partner whose health status they don't know, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who injects drugs.

If you were born in a country where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from a high prevalence country, talk to your provider about being vaccinated. You may be given the first dose and tested for the virus at the same time.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute or chronic. People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick, but can still infect others. Vaccination is the best protection against hepatitis B. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? If you were born in the United States in 1991 or later, you were most likely vaccinated as an infant. Before 1991, the vaccine was only given to high-risk adults.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

This two-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated teens. Teens who are missing the last dose should complete the series in order to be fully protected against hepatitis A. Unvaccinated men should get this vaccine series if they have sex with men, have a partner or live with someone who has hepatitis A, or if they use illicit drugs.

The hepatitis A virus attacks the liver. There is no treatment for hepatitis A. While most people recover without permanent liver damage, they will probably feel very sick for a while. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? Routine vaccination began in 1999 so older teens and most adults have not been vaccinated. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm.

Even if you don't have symptoms, screenings can detect many sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

COUNSELING

Contraception

If you and your partner want to avoid pregnancy, learn about birth control methods both of you can use. The most effective options for men are using condoms correctly and consistently, abstinence (not having sex), and vasectomy (permanent contraception). Your female partner has many more options to choose from. By learning about her preferred method, you can support her choice.

Also learn about emergency contraception (EC), or the "morning after pill," that she can use to prevent pregnancy if you had unprotected sex. EC can prevent pregnancy if taken within a few days of having unprotected sex. It is available to anyone without a prescription at family planning clinics and pharmacies.

STI Prevention

Using a male or female condom every time you have sex is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of getting many STIs, including HIV. Other effective ways to protect yourself include abstinence (not having sex) or only having one partner who you know does not have an STI. If you have sex without a condom, have an STI or recently had one, or have a new partner and are unsure of their health status, talk to your provider or a health educator. They can counsel you on ways to protect yourself and your partner from STIs, including whether medicines to prevent HIV infection are right for you. People who do not have HIV but are at high risk of becoming infected can stay healthy by taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) might be prescribed if you think you've been exposed to HIV. Also, consult the resources at the end of this guide for more information about preventing STIs.

IT'S YOUR BODY!

You know your body better than anyone. Always tell your health care provider about any changes in your health. Speak to them about any concerns you may have about conditions, diseases, or issues related to sexual functioning or performance.

RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR MEN

Sexual Health Service	Adolescent (13-18 years)	Adult (19+)
Chlamydia screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk
Counseling to prevent sexually transmitted infections	Those who are sexually active	Those who are at risk
Gonorrhea screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk
Hepatitis A vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Men who have sex with men
Hepatitis B vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis B screening	Those who are at risk (including men who have sex with men) and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common	Those who are at risk (including men who have sex with men) and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis C screening	Not recommended	Those born between 1945 and 1965 Injection drug users
HIV testing	Those who are or have been sexually active (test at least once)	Those who are or have been sexually active (test at least once) Those who are at risk (test at least annually)
HPV vaccine	Those not vaccinated at age 11 or 12	May be given through age 26
Syphilis screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk

How Do I Know if I'm at Risk?

Your sexual health is at risk if you answer "yes" to any of the following questions:

- Have you had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)?
- Do you have multiple partners?
- Do you have an STI, including HIV?
- Have you shared injection drug equipment, including needles or syringes?
- Do you exchange sex for drugs or money?
- Do you have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know?

What Types of Health Care Providers Address Sexual Health?

Described below are the types of health care professionals who can provide sexual health care services and advice, along with where you can find them. For specific information about how to locate a provider near you, please consult the resources at the end of this guide.

Primary care providers, such as internists, family doctors, general medicine doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and nurse-midwives, are trained in general medicine and care for the whole body. They work in private doctors' offices, clinics, community health centers, family planning clinics, STI clinics, and college health systems. Even if they do not specialize in sexual health, they can be a good starting point and refer you to a specialist, if needed.

Specialists, such as obstetricians and gynecologists (OB/GYNs), urologists, and women's health nurse practitioners, focus on women's and men's reproductive health. They work in private doctors' offices, community health centers, and family planning clinics.

Health educators work in clinics, community-based programs, schools, and colleges. They might offer sexual health counseling and educational materials to inform and equip people to make healthy decisions.

Pharmacists, working in pharmacies, clinics, and community health centers, are experts about prescription and over-the-counter medications and can dispense birth control.

Mental health professionals, such as therapists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, sex therapists, and psychiatrists, can address the emotional and mental health issues related to sexual problems. You will find them at college campuses, private practices, clinics, community health centers, and social service agencies.

How Can I Talk with My Health Care Provider about Sexual Health?

How do I bring up the topic?

Talking about your sexual health might make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. However, if you talk openly and honestly with your provider about your body and concerns, he or she can give you better care and advice. You have the right to get full and accurate information about sexual health. And, remember, it is your provider's job to help you take care of your whole body.

Ways you could start the conversation are:

> *"I just saw an article about high rates of sexually transmitted infections. What can I do to protect myself?"*
>
> *"I know I'm here to get a check-up, but can we talk about my sexual health for a few minutes? I have some questions."*
>
> *"I'm in a new relationship, and I'm not sure about the best ways to protect myself from infections and getting pregnant."*

IF YOU ARE TRANSGENDER

Many of the preventive services in this guide will help you stay healthy. Although finding a provider who can address your unique healthcare needs may be challenging, it is important to get tested regularly for HIV and other STIs, and vaccinated against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and HPV (if you're eligible). Use condoms and practice safer sex to protect you and your partners. For more in-depth guidance, see the resources listed at the end of this guide.

What kinds of questions should I ask?

The questions you might ask can cover a range of topics, including: the best forms of contraception, STI screening and treatment, preventing STIs, protecting your fertility, and issues related to sexual functioning or performance.

Sample questions you might ask during your visit:

Screening and Testing

- What tests are you giving me?
- How are they done?
- When and how will I get my results?

Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Based on my history, should I be tested for STIs, including HIV? Which ones?
- How often should I be tested for STIs?
- Should my partner get tested, too?
- Are there any vaccines I should get to protect myself from STIs?
- How can I protect myself from getting STIs?
- If I have an STI, can it be treated?

Contraceptives

- What are the most effective forms of birth control?
- What are the best options for me?
- What are the side effects of different contraceptives?
- How and where can I get affordable contraceptives?

Partner Issues

- I want my partner and I to get tested for STIs before we have sex for the first time. How should I bring up the topic?
- How do I tell my partner if I test positive for an STI?
- What if my partner doesn't want to use a condom?
- I'm married and I assume my spouse is only having sex with me. Should I still be tested for STIs?
- My partner cheated on me and I'm worried I might have an STI. Which STIs should I be tested for?

Sexual Functioning or Performance

- I no longer find sex (or masturbation) pleasurable. Why?
- My sex drive is lower than normal. What's the deal?
- Having sex hurts. What's the problem?
- I'm being treated for another illness or disease, and I'm wondering how that will affect my sex life?
- I'm having trouble getting an erection/reaching climax. What's going on?
- I was told my prostate is enlarged. Will this affect my sex life?

What questions might my health care provider ask me?

Your provider might ask you questions that seem personal, but don't take it personally. They generally ask all of their patients the same questions. Answering these questions will give your health care provider information to help keep you healthy and safe.

Health care professionals might ask you the following questions about your sexual history and current behaviors:

- Are you sexually active? If no, have you ever been?
- Do you have sex with men only, women only, or both?
- Do you have anal, oral and/or vaginal sex?
- How many people have you ever had sex with? In the past six months? In the past 12 months?
- What are you doing to protect yourself from STIs?
- Have you been tested for STIs, including HIV? Would you like to be tested?
- Have you or your partner ever tested positive for an STI? If so, which one(s), and where was the infection found?
- Were you and/or your partner treated?
- Are you or your partner trying to get pregnant?
- Are you concerned about getting pregnant or getting your partner pregnant?
- Are you or your partner using contraception? Do you need any information about types of contraceptives?
- Are you happy with your sex life? Do you have any concerns or questions about your sexual functioning?
- Have you ever been coerced or pressured to have sex or do something you didn't want to do?
- Do you or your partner use alcohol or illicit drugs when you have sex?

What to Look For in a Sexual Health Care Provider

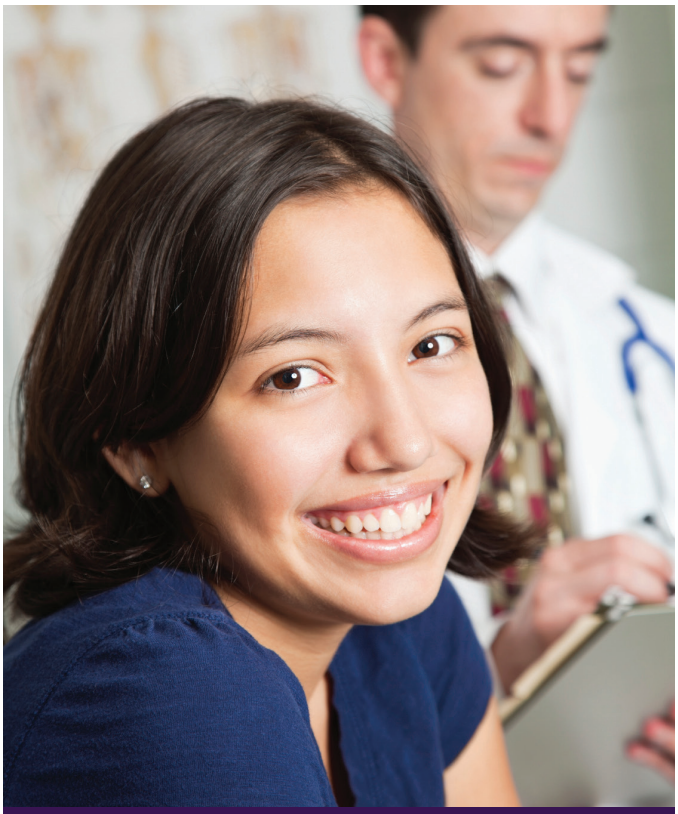
Remember, a health care provider who takes good care of your sexual health should:

- Have a friendly and welcoming staff
- Speak clearly and use words you understand
- Put you at ease and listen to any sexual and reproductive health issues that are important to you
- Answer your questions and address your concerns in a helpful, respectful way
- Ask permission before performing any tests
- Explain what they're doing and the reason why
- Keep your conversations confidential
- Support your right to make decisions about your sexual health care, based on your own values and what you believe is best for yourself

A health care provider should **NOT**:

- Assume to know your sexual behaviors or preferences without asking
- Be judgmental in response to your questions or concerns
- Be disrespectful of your sexual orientation or preferences
- Deny you care or treatment because of your sexual choices

If you feel uncomfortable with your health care provider for any reason, listen to your feelings. Ask your friends or family to recommend someone you can trust, research providers through an online rating site, or ask your health plan for a list of top-rated doctors in your area.



TAKE CHARGE

You can do many things to take charge of your sexual health. Make visiting a health care provider a priority. But, when you go for a visit, don't just rely on your provider. It's up to you to know which services you need and to make sure that you get them.

Schedule an appointment and get the services and advice you need to take care of your entire body, and to help you enjoy good sexual health for a lifetime.

Where to Learn More

TO FIND A PROVIDER OR CLINIC

Get Tested

http://gettested.cdc.gov

Use this site to find fast, free, and confidential testing locations near you. You can also learn which tests and vaccines you may need. Enter your zip code or city and state in the search box. It has a list of FAQs about HIV, viral hepatitis, and other STIs.

Health Resources and Services Administration

http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov

Use the search box to find a federally-funded health center near you. These centers provide care even if you don't have health insurance. You pay what you can afford, based on your income.

National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

http://www.nafcclinics.org

Search for a free clinic near you using the search box on the home page. Free clinics typically provide primary care to those who are uninsured and low-income. Some may also provide specialty care and run pharmacies where you can get free medicine.

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

http://www.nationalfamilyplanning.org

To find a federally-funded family planning clinic near you, enter your address or zip code in the search box on the home page.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

http://www.plannedparenthood.org

Find a local Planned Parenthood clinic by using the "Find a Health Center" search box on the home page. This site provides a range of sexual and reproductive health information for men and women (including teens), plus resources for parents and educators.

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists

http://www.aasect.org

To find a sexuality educator, counselor, or therapist in your area, go to the "Locate a Professional" section on the home page.

American College of Nurse-Midwives

http://ourmomentoftruth.midwife.org

Nurse-midwives provide primary care to women of all ages, as well as maternity care to pregnant women. Click "Find a Midwife" in the upper right corner on the home page to search for a midwifery practice near you.

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

http://www.acog.org

Click "Find an Ob-Gyn" on the right side of the home page, then search by state, provider name, or zip code to find a physician. This site also provides information about women's sexual and reproductive health.

Where to Learn More

HIV, STIs, AND VIRAL HEPATITIS

American Sexual Health Association

http://www.ashasexualhealth.org

Go here to learn about various STIs and screening tests, as well as tips for having safe sex. This site also contains the HPV Resource Center and the Herpes Resource Center. Resources are available for parents, teachers, and health care providers.

The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource

http://www.thebody.com

Learn everything you need to know about HIV and AIDS.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/std

http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/PublicInfo.htm#whatIsHep

Visit the CDC's web site for information about STIs and viral hepatitis, as well as ways to prevent them.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

http://www.rainn.org

This site can help survivors of sexual violence get the assistance they need. The National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-HOPE) is open 24/7.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

http://www.thehotline.org

Visit this site to learn about ways to safely leave an abusive relationship or to help someone who is in one. The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3324 (for TTY)) is open 24/7.

CONTRACEPTIVES

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

http://www.arhp.org

Use their Method Match (http://www.arhp.org/MethodMatch) to compare up to four types of contraception to find the best method for you. You can also get information on a range of sexual health topics, including men's reproductive health.

Bedsider Birth Control Support Network

http://www.bedsider.org

Explore different birth control methods and find one that's right for you. You can also search for nearby places to get birth control.

Condomology

http://www.factsaboutcondoms.com

Everything you need to know about condoms. Watch a video on how to put one on correctly and understand how condoms prevent different STIs, as well as pregnancy.

The Emergency Contraception Website

http://ec.princeton.edu

Learn about the types of emergency contraception and find a location where you can get it.

Where to Learn More

TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

Advocates for Youth

http://www.advocatesforyouth.org

Parents, educators, health care providers, and others will find information and resources to help teens and young adults make healthy sexual decisions.

Coalition for Positive Sexuality

http://www.positive.org

Provides information to young people about safe sex, contraception, STIs, parental consent laws, and more.

It's Your (Sex) Life

http://www.itsyoursexlife.com

Go here to get information about relationships, learn about various sexual health topics, and view a list of hotlines and resources.

I Wanna Know!

http://www.iwannaknow.org

This site provides guidance to help young people protect their sexual health, explains the changes that occur during puberty, and addresses misinformation about sex and STIs.

Kinsey Confidential

http://kinseyconfidential.org

This site provides college-age adults with information on a variety of sexual health topics. This information is available through articles, blogs, podcasts, and Q&As.

Scarleteen

http://www.scarleteen.com

This site provides sex education for teens and young adults. Read up on sex and sexuality, relationships, gender, and more.

Sex, Etc.

http://sexetc.org

Sexual health information for teens, by teens.

Where to Learn More

GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth

Go here to learn about health issues that affect LGBT people, as well as the sexual health services they should get.

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association

http://www.glma.org

This site can help LGBT individuals find a health care provider they can trust and understand the important health topics they should discuss with their provider.

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network

http://www.glsen.org

Learn how to help schools become safer and more respectful for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

GLBT National Help Center

http://www.glnh.org

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of all ages can call the national hotline (1-888-843-4564) to access peer counseling, information, and local resources. A youth hotline is also available (1-888-246-7743).

TransGenderCare

http://www.transgendercare.com

Find information about transition-related treatments and therapies for transgender individuals.

World Professional Association for Transgender Health

http://www.wpath.org

The Standards of Care (SOC) inform health care providers and consumers about strategies to help transgender individuals achieve optimal health. Access the SOC by clicking "Publications" on the navigation bar.

YouthResource

http://www.youthresource.com

LGBTQ young people can go here for information and support on sexual and reproductive health issues.

Where to Learn More

OLDER ADULTS

Safer Sex for Seniors

http://safersex4seniors.org

Go here for information for older adults about sex and sexuality. Learn how to talk to your partner or health care provider, understand how desire changes as we age, and educate yourself about safe sex practices.

ACRIA

http://www.ageisnotacondom.org

Get tips on overcoming issues that can reduce sexual desire among older adults, and learn important facts about HIV and people over age 50.

AARP

http://www.aarp.org/home-family/sex-intimacy

Learn about keeping the passion alive while also staying healthy in the Sex & Intimacy section of AARP's web site.

Administration on Aging

http://www.aoa.acl.gov/AoA_Programs/HPW/HIV_AIDS

Educate yourself about HIV/AIDS among older adults and find a testing location near you. This site also has links to other resources about HIV/AIDS among people over 50.

It's time to give sexual health the attention it deserves.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

Partnership for Prevention®
Shaping Policies • Improving Health