Lovelife
Sexual health for young people
Introduction

“Seventeen and the only virgin in my class – I thought I was the last person in the world who’d never had it.”

“Everybody’s doing it – maybe I should too.”

“I don’t want to – but how do I say ‘no’?”

Contents

It can be hard to decide if you should have sex or not. But in the end it’s what’s right for you, and only you can answer that.

This booklet aims to help you through the maze – giving you the facts about sex, answering your questions, and telling you where you can get help and advice.

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How you can make sex safer

Fact: only condoms provide 'all-in-one' protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Remember, it's your body, your choice and your right to say no. Only have sex because you want to.

If you and your partner decide you both want to have sex, there's a lot of new things to think about such as contraception, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Here are some good reasons for making it safer.

Babies
To keep the risk of pregnancy low, you or your partner need to use a reliable method of contraception. There are many different types of contraception, but only condoms provide 'all-in-one' protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Sexually transmitted infections
Sexually transmitted infections are very common. Having sex without a condom puts you at risk of a sexually transmitted infection. And that includes HIV, the virus which causes AIDS.

Not all sexual infections have symptoms. So you or your partner could have one and not even know about it. That's why it is important to have safer sex instead of taking a risk.

Listen to what your partner wants. If they don't want to have sex, don't put pressure on them.

Always use a condom that carries the European CE mark or the CE and British Kitemark every time you have sex.
Be prepared

Being prepared doesn't mean taking the fun out of sex. And it doesn't mean you are planning to sleep around. It just makes sense.

'But I'm embarrassed buying condoms'
You may feel embarrassed but the shop assistant won't give it a second thought. If you don't like to ask for condoms, buy them from a machine or in a supermarket where you can get them off the shelf with other goods. Once you've bought them a few times you'll find it much easier.

Discuss what protection you are going to use early on - that way it'll be easier to agree on safer sex, or to change your mind about having sex at all if either of you don't feel happy. The best way to make sure that you don't have unprotected sex is to plan ahead.

And remember that you can usually get free condoms in most of the following places:

- family planning clinics;
- Brook Advisory Centres;
- sexual health or STD or GUM (sexually transmitted disease or genito-urinary medicine) clinics;
- young people's clinics, if you're under 25; and
- gay pubs and clubs.

For details of your nearest GUM or STD clinic, look up the lovelife website: www.lovelife.uk.com

Be in control

Practise putting one on first and you'll soon get used to it.

You've bought the condoms - now how do you suggest using one? Talking about safer sex doesn't have to be difficult. Once you mention it you might find your partner is just as keen to talk about it as you are. If you can't find the right words to talk about it, you could try one of these ideas.

- Wait until you're both undressing and then ask 'Your condoms or mine?' It's easier to do this when you've still got your underwear on and you're not in any danger of getting carried away.
- Say 'We need to use a condom. I would never have sex without one.'
- Say 'Let's use a condom - better safe than sorry.'

Don't forget there are also lots of ways of having sex that don't involve penetration (where the penis enters the vagina, anus or mouth)... kissing, stroking and touching can be just as exciting!

'But they're difficult to put on'
Practice makes perfect.

'But they spoil the flow'
Not if you make it part of the fun!
Condom tips

Condoms come in different shapes, textures and flavours. There is also a female condom which fits inside the vagina. Whichever type of condom you choose, make sure you use one with the CE mark or CE and British Kitemark symbols.

- Be prepared — if you’re likely to be in a situation where you may have sex — maybe after parties, clubs, raves, or going to the pub — make sure you’ve got condoms with you. It is better to be prepared than risk unsafe sex. After all, you can easily hide condoms in your pocket or purse.

Watch out — drink (not to mention drugs) can change the way you behave. You may not think so, but even a little drink can affect what you do, and you could end up doing something you’ll regret later.

Going abroad — buying condoms abroad can be difficult. So remember to buy them before you go.

When you’re using a condom, remember the following.

- If you are using a condom for the first time, read the instructions on the packet.
- Always put the condom on well before the penis enters the vagina, anus or mouth. A small amount of semen comes out of the penis before ejaculation (precum), which you may not even notice.
- Heat can damage condoms, so keep them in a cool, dry place.
- Condoms don’t last forever — so check the expiry date on the packet.
- Most condoms are already lubricated to make them easier to use, but you might find that using extra lubricant can make sex better and help prevent the condom tearing. Only use water-based lubricants, such as KY jelly, Clinigel or Boots lubricating jelly. Oil-based lubricants, such as Vaseline or baby oil can damage the condoms, so don’t use them.
- Spermicide, a chemical that kills sperm, gives extra protection against pregnancy when you use it with a condom. Many condoms already have spermicide on them but you can also buy it separately as a foam, cream, pessary or gel.
- For anal sex (where the penis enters the anus), make sure you use plenty of water-based lubricant.