

# SEXUAL HEALTH



Student Life brings a sense of freedom and excitement with new challenges, new people, new social experiences and new sexual experiences.

The message coming across society is that everybody is having sex. But if you don't there is nothing wrong with that and you should not feel the pressure if you don't want or if you are not ready to have sex. Always remember it's your body and your own choice.

If you are having sex it's important that you protect yourself from STI's and you avoid an unwanted pregnancy.

This guide is to provide you information on STIs and advice on contraception.



# 1. STIs

The bad thing about sex is that you can catch and/or pass on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) whoever you are having sex with. STIs are a bacterial or viral infection and much more common than what we think. You can't tell by looking at someone whether they have a STI or not. So it is important to know the signs and symptoms.

Bear in mind that **signs can go unnoticed for a long time** and some people don't have symptoms of STIs so it's worth getting tested even if you feel healthy.

If you think you have a STI don't panic, most STIs can be treated and cured.

## 1.1 STIs – A to Z

### HIV

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system which defends our body against illness. It is found in infected blood, semen or vaginal fluid. HIV can develop into AIDS meaning the body is no longer able to protect itself against infections and diseases.

#### HOW DO YOU GET IT?

- Unprotected sex with HIV positive person
- Shared needles or other injecting equipment
- Mother to baby during pregnancy or breastfeeding

#### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually appear around 10 days after infection

- Fever and Fatigue
- Rash
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Severe sore throat
- Chest and skin infections

#### TREATMENT

Drugs and medications are available to treat HIV. It aims to slow down or stabilize the progress of the HIV infection.

**HIV CANNOT BE CURED**

## **Hepatitis C**

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver and further long-term health problems. As many as 9 out of 10 people don't know they have hepatitis C.

The infection is often chronic however in most cases few symptoms occur.

### **HOW DO YOU GET IT?**

- Unprotected sex
- Shared needles or other injecting equipments
- Mother to baby during pregnancy or breastfeeding
- Getting a tattoo, piercing or receiving medical or dental treatment with unsterilized equipment
- Sharing a toothbrush or razor

### **SYMPTOMS**

- Flu-like illness : tiredness, nausea, vomiting, aching muscles
- Lack of interest in food and weight loss
- Darker urine and jaundice

### **TREATMENT**

Drugs can be used to treat hepatitis but is not always effective

## **Syphilis**

Syphilis is an old STI making a comeback today and is on the rise in the UK

### **HOW DO YOU GET IT?**

- Unprotected sex

### **SYMPTOMS**

Syphilis infection goes through different stages of symptoms

#### **1<sup>st</sup> stage:**

An ulcer appears about 2 to 6 weeks after being infected but many people do not notice it. the ulcer disappears several weeks later without treatment but the disease is still here and comes to stage 2.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> stage:**

- A skin rash appears with brownish sores
- Sore throat, fever and headache

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> stage ( less likely to appear)**

- Blindness
- Heart disease
- Mental illness

## TREATMENT

Syphilis can be treated with antibiotics. An injection of penicillin kills the bacteria within 24 hours.

=> 50% of infected men and 80% of infected women have no symptoms at all!

## **Chlamydia**

Increasing among young people, Chlamydia is one of the most common STIs but it is easy to be treated.

### HOW DO YOU GET IT?

- Unprotected sex
- Mother to baby during pregnancy

### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms appear 7 to 21 days after the infection.

#### *Males*

- Stinging sensation when peeing
- White/cloudy discharge from the penis
- Pain or tenderness in the testicles

#### *Females*

- Peeing stings
- Unusual vaginal discharge
- Pain during sex
- Bleeding between periods
- Heavy periods
- Pelvis and lower abdomen pain

#### Complications

*Males:* damage to testicles, sterility, infection to prostate and Reiter's syndrome (arthritis and sore eyes)

*Females:* infection of the womb and fallopian tubes, infertility, increased risk of ectopic pregnancy, liver inflammation and Reiter's syndrome

## TREATMENT

Chlamydia can be treated by antibiotics.

## **Gonorrhoea**

Gonorrhoea is an infection caused by a bacteria like Chlamydia. It is less common but young people are at the greater risk.

## HOW DO YOU GET IT?

- Unprotected sex

## SYMPTOMS

Signs usually start 2 to 10 days after the infection

- Painful urination
- Yellowish, greenish or creamy discharge from the penis or the vagina
- Frequent need to pee
- Tenderness in testicles
- Sore throat and fever
- Heavy periods or bleeding between periods

*Complications:* infertility and inflammation of the pelvis or testicles

## TREATMENT

A single dose of penicillin will treat gonorrhoea

## **Genital Herpes**

Genital Herpes is a virus that can not be cured.

There are two strands of the virus:

- Herpes simplex type 1 causes cold sores around the mouth and can affect the eyes
- Herpes simplex type 2 infects the skin around the genitals

## HOW DO YOU GET IT?

- Unprotected sex
- Mother to baby during pregnancy

## SYMPTOMS

- Small watery blister around the genitals that can leave painful sores, ulcers or crusts
- Fever, headache and aching muscles

=> Most people won't have herpes crisis more than once but it can become active again if you are run down or stressed

## TREATMENT

- Herpes cannot be cured but antiviral tablets and liquids are available to help contain a herpes outbreak
- Pain and fever is best treated with paracetamol and bed rest

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver.

### HOW DO YOU GET IT?

- Unprotected sex
- Contaminated needles
- Tattoo or piercing unsterilized equipment
- Shared towels, toothbrushes and nail clippers
- Mother to baby during pregnancy

### SYMPTOMS

- Flu like illness: nausea, vomiting, aching muscles
- Lack of interest in food and weight loss
- Jaundice and darker urine

*Complications:* long term liver damage

### TREATMENT

In most cases, you don't need any treatment to recover from the infection

**THE ONLY WAY TO PROTECT FROM STIs IS TO USE CONDOMS**

## 1.2 STIs- How to get tested?

Sexual Health checks are free everywhere in the UK.

If you think you are infected by an STI get tested.

Method to get tested may vary:

- Swab from the cervix or tip of penis
- Blood sample
- Wee sample

**Getting tested don't hurt  
You can talk to an advisor before doing the test**

It can be done at various medical places:

- Some GP surgeries
- Sexual health clinic or GUM clinic
- Some community contraceptive clinics
- Some young people's services

All services are completely confidential and non judgmental.

If you are tested positive don't panic, most STIs are treatable. Your clinic will help you to talk to your current and previous partner(s) so that they get tested too.

You can find your local medical service on [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

## **2. Condoms**

If you have sex you should make sure you protect yourself and your partner against STIs. The only way to protect against STIs is to use a condom. With a long term partner you should stop using a condom only if you are 100% sure none of you has a STI.

You should ensure you always have condoms with you when you are going out so that you are not in a situation when you need one but don't have it.

### **2.1 Male and Female Condoms**

#### **Female Condoms** (up to 95% effective)

Female condoms are put inside the vagina before having sex to stop sperm getting into the womb.

#### **BENEFITS**

- Female condoms protect against STIs as well as pregnancies
- It's suitable for most women
- It does not cause any allergy

#### **Male Condoms** (98% effective)

Male condoms are made from thin latex, polyisoprene or polyurethane and help to protect from pregnancies and STIs.

It covers the penis and acts as a barrier to stop the sperm coming into contact with the partner's genital. It has to be put on when the penis is erect and just before to have sex.

Male condoms come in different sizes, shapes, colours, textures and flavours so there will be one that suits you. Many people find putting on a condom an enjoyable and fun part of sex.

You may wish to use lubricant to reduce friction during sex. Ensure you are using a water based lubricant if you use a lubricant; do not use oil based products as it can damage latex condoms.

## **BENEFITS**

- Condoms are easy to use and do not have any side effects
- Condoms are the only method for men to control their fertility

Always check that condoms you buy have a BSI or CE mark (high safety standards) on the packet and the use by date is not exceeded.

It must be stored in places not too hot or too cold and away from sharp or rough surfaces that could tear them or wear them away.

Read careful instructions before using a condoms for the first time. condoms can split if not used properly

Women having sex with a man are advised to use another method of contraception as well in case the condom splits or comes off.

## **2.2 C CARD**

You can get free condoms from different places:

- Community contraceptive clinics
- Sexual health
- Genitourinary medicine clinics
- Young people services
- Your Students' Union



You can also buy condoms in:

- Chemist
- Petrol station
- Machines in public toilets, bars and clubs
- Online

**Your Students' Union is a C CARD point.**

C CARD is a service provided by NHS Lothian which offers free condoms. Any QMU students can access the C Card service.

The service is free and confidential. You don't even need to give your name. All you need to do is to come to register in the Welfare Point (in the SU Office building). You will only be asked your date of birth and the first part of your post code. This information is for records and monitoring purposes.

Once you are registered, you will receive a card which will allow you to get free condoms when you need them just by showing your card

### **3. Contraception**

Women who are having sex with men and don't want to get pregnant are advised to use contraception. There are many methods of contraception to choose from and you don't need to pay for it. So don't be put off if the first thing you use is not suitable for you. If you are unsure you can ask your GP or a nurse for advice.

Some contraception methods may not be suitable for some women. Before prescribing you any contraceptive, your doctor or nurse will ask you some questions on your health and your family's medical history.

In most cases, it is advised to use condoms in the first seven days you are starting a new contraceptive. Some methods may not protect you against pregnancies immediately

**Contraception does not protect from STIs**

**Always use a condom when you have sex**

#### **3.1 Contraception A to Z**

##### **Caps (up to 95% effective)**

Caps are small circular dome made of thin, soft latex or silicone to be inserted into the vagina before you have sex (no more than 3 hours earlier). It covers the cervix so that sperm does not get into the womb.

To be effective, you must put spermicide on the cap and leave the cap in place for 6 hours after sex. Once you take out the cap you can wash it and reuse it.

There are different sizes so you must be fitted for the correct size by a trained doctor or nurse.

##### **BENEFITS**

- It is not affected by any medicines
- You can't feel it when you have sex
- It does not disturb your menstrual cycle

##### **INCONVENIENCES**

- If you lose or gain more than 3kg in weight, have a baby, miscarriage or abortion, you may need to be fitted with a new cap.

## **Combined pill** (more than 99%)

The combined pill is a tablet containing oestrogen and progestogen, two hormones naturally released from the ovaries that prevent from ovulating and from the egg to implant.

The pill must be taken every day for 21 days then stopped for 7 days during which you have a withdrawal bleed and you keep being protected against pregnancy. After these 7 days you must start again the pill.

There are lots of different pills so there's surely one for you.

### **BENEFITS**

- Bleeding is lighter, shorter and less painful
- Protect against cancers of the ovary, womb and colon
- Reduce spotty skin

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Must be taken according to instructions (same time everyday)
- Not effective if you are sick (vomiting or diarrhoea)
- Effectiveness may be reduced by other medications
- Not suitable if you are over 35 and a smoker
- Low risk of blood clots and cervical cancer
- Mood swings, breast tenderness and headaches

## **Contraceptive Implant** (more than 99.9% effective)

Implants are small flexible tubes containing progestogen; hormone that stops the release of eggs from the ovary. It is inserted under the skin of your upper arm and lasts for three years.

### **BENEFITS**

- You don't have to think about it every day for three years
- Not affected by other medications
- Useful for women who can't use contraception with oestrogen
- Can be removed at any time

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Some discomfort
- Your periods may become irregular or stop
- Effectiveness may be reduced by medicines

You need a professional to give them to you. The doctor or nurse will give you a local anaesthetic injection to insert in your arm the implant. It takes only a few minutes.

## **Contraceptive injection** (more than 99% effective)

Contraceptive injection is made of progesterone. It is injected in the upper arm and protects against pregnancy for 8 to 12 weeks. It stops the sperm from reaching an egg and the egg to implant itself. It may also stop ovulation.

### **BENEFITS**

- Last for 12 weeks
- You don't have to think about it every day
- Useful if you can't use contraception with oestrogen
- It is not affected by medication
- Protect against cancer of the womb and pelvis inflammation

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Weight gain, headaches, mood swings, breast tenderness
- Irregular bleeding for 3 weeks
- Can't be removed from your body for 12 weeks
- Fertility may take long to return to normal after the injection wears off
- It can thin the bones
- Follow up injection must be given on time

## **Contraceptive patch** (more than 99% effective)

The contraceptive patch delivers oestrogen and progesterone into the body through the skin. It works as the combined pill. One patch is kept for 7 days and changed every week for three weeks followed by a week off.

It must be stuck on a clean and dry skin.

### **BENEFITS**

- You don't need to think about it every day
- Protects against cancers of the ovary, womb or colon
- You can wear it in the bath, swimming pool and while playing sport
- Can be worn on most areas of the body
- Periods are more regular, lighter and less painful

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Increasing blood pressure, headache
- Not suitable if you are over 35 and a smoker
- It may cause skin irritation
- If you lose or forget to re apply your patch with 48hours of taking it off you could be at risk of getting pregnant

## **Diaphragms** (92-96% effective)

A diaphragm is a circular dome made of thin, soft latex or silicone. It is put into the vagina before sex and covers the cervix so that sperm does not get into the womb.

It must be used with spermicide and be left in place at least 6 hours after sex. You can wash it after use and re use it.

It comes in different size so you must be fitted by a doctor or a nurse.

### **BENEFITS**

- No serious health risk
- You only have to think about it when you have sex
- You can put it in several hours before you have sex
- You can't feel it when you have sex
- It does not disturb your menstrual cycle

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- If you lose or gain more than 3 kg, have a baby, a miscarriage or abortion you may need to be fitted with a new diaphragm

## **Intrauterine device** (more than 99% effective)

An Intrauterine device (IUD) is a small T shaped plastic or copper device inserted into the uterus by a health professional. It prevents sperm from surviving into the cervix, womb and fallopian tubes and eggs to implant in the womb.

IUD can last up to 10 years. None of them have any hormones and there are various types and sizes available.

### **BENEFITS**

- You don't have to think about it every day
- You can use it whether or not you have had children
- It can be removed at any time
- Return to normal levels of fertility is quick
- It works immediately

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Changes to your periods in the first months
- Periods heavier, longer and more painful
- Very small chance of infection in the first 20 days
- Not suitable if you have had pelvic infections

- Risk that your body may expel it
- Discomfort at the beginning

It takes about 15-20 minutes to be put in and can be uncomfortable or painful for some women. local anaesthetic and painkillers may be used to reduce the pain.

You will have to go back to the doctor to check it has been well fitted. the doctor will explain you how to check it is well fitted so that you can do it yourself once a month.

### **Intrauterine System**( more than 99% effective)

IUS is a small T shaped plastic device containing progestogen inserted into your uterus by a specialist to prevent sperm to reach an egg and eggs to implant in the womb. it lasts for 5 years.

#### **BENEFITS**

- You can use it whether or not you have had children
- It can be removed at any time and fertility is quick to return
- It makes periods lighter, shorter and less painful
- You don't have to think about it every day
- It is not affected by other medications

#### **INCONVENIENCES**

- Mood swings, skin problems, breast tenderness,
- Irregular bleeding
- Small risk of infection

It takes about 15-20 minutes to be fitted and may cause discomfort. You may want to use a local anaesthetic or painkillers. you may have some period type pain or bleeding for a few days.

You will have to go back to the doctor 3 to 6 weeks later to ensure the IUS is in place. The doctor or nurse will explain you how to check it so that you can do it once a month.

## **Progestogen-only pill** (up to 99% effective)

Known as mini-pill or POP, the progestogen-only pill contains only progestogen and has to be taken everyday at the same specific time. You take one pill everyday until the end of the tablet and then start straight away the next packet without break.

It stops the sperm getting into the egg and eggs to implant into the womb. It may stop ovulation.

### **BENEFITS**

- Useful for women who can't take contraception with oestrogen
- You can take it if you are over 35 and a smoker
- Can be used when breastfeeding

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- It may not work if you are sick
- Some medicines may affect the POP's effectiveness
- Your periods may stop or become irregular
- Spotty skin and breast tenderness

## **Vaginal Ring** (more than 99% effective)

The vaginal ring is a small soft plastic ring to place inside the vagina for 21 days at a time. The ring releases oestrogen and progestogen that reduces ovulation and prevent sperm to reach eggs

It must be placed the first day of your period and removed 21 days later. You should insert a new one after a break of 7 days.

### **BENEFITS**

- You don't have to think about it everyday
- Easy to put in and take out
- Effective even if you are sick
- Bleeding is lighter and less painful

### **INCONVENIENCES**

- More vaginal discharge, headaches and breast tenderness
- Blood clot and high pressure
- Can come out particularly after and during sex (if it does, wash it with warm water and replace it within 3 hours)
- Not suitable if you are over 35 and a smoker, overweight or have migraine
- Some medicines make it less effective

### **3.2 Emergency contraception**

if you are at risk of pregnancy e.g. a condom split, your forgot to take your contraceptive on time, you are not taking any contraceptive, then you can use an emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy.

There are two types of emergency contraceptive:

- the emergency contraceptive pill or morning after pill: it has to be taken within 3 days after unprotected sex. the longer you wait to take it the less it is efficient so it is advised to take it as soon as possible
- the emergency intrauterine device: it can be fitted up to 5 days after unprotected sex by a health professional

If you are at risk of unwanted pregnancy you are also at risk for any STIs. It is advised to also go for an STI test.

### **3.3 Where to get contraceptives?**

You can get free contraceptives in various health services:

- GP surgeries
- Community contraceptive clinics
- Genitourinary medicine clinics
- Sexual health clinics
- Some young people's services

To find your nearest sexual health clinic go on [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

Most places also offers information and confidential advice.

Before making an appointment make sure you are as informed as possible about contraceptive options available.

For more information:

- FPA: sexual health charity providing free information and advice  
[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk) 0845 122 8690
- Brook : confidential service for under 25s  
[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk) 0808 802 1234
- The site  
[www.thesite.org](http://www.thesite.org)
- Sexual health line : information and advice on sexual health.  
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