

When I find a boyfriend can I ditch the condoms? / Terrence Higgins Trust, GMFA.

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Publication/Creation

London : Terrence Higgins Trust, [2010]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/u55cz3bu>

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When I find
a boyfriend,
can I ditch
the condoms?

Terrence
HIGGINS
TRUST



If you've had sex with someone a few times, or you're starting a relationship, condoms might not seem as important. However, lots of guys have got HIV because they stopped using condoms with a partner who they thought was negative. Always using condoms and lube if you fuck is the most reliable way to avoid passing on or catching HIV.



Have a plan

If you want to stop using condoms with a partner, and you both want to avoid HIV, it will help you to stay safe if you come up with a plan first. This could include what your rules are for having sex with other guys and how you would cope if one of you broke those rules.

Go for an HIV test

The first step is to get the facts. So before you go ahead, you need to be sure that you are both HIV-negative. **You should go for an HIV test to be certain of your HIV status.**

Taking an HIV test together will help you and your partner to make the right choices about the sex you have, and avoid guesswork. If you both test negative, you can decide if you want to rely on the trust and security of a relationship to stay HIV-negative. Remember that you can only be sure of being negative if you re-test after the window period (one to three months, depending on the test used), and if neither of you has taken any sexual risks during this time. Many gay guys use this safer sex strategy with a long-term partner and, if you both test negative and don't fuck without condoms outside the relationship, it can work.



If you are not absolutely certain that both of you are HIV-negative, you should continue to use condoms and lube with each other.

If one or both of you is HIV-positive, getting diagnosed means you can start treatment early before the virus seriously damages your immune system. If one of you tests positive and the other negative, using condoms and lube will be the safest way to avoid passing the virus on to the negative partner, regardless of whether the positive partner takes medication straight away. It will also help to stop you passing on many other STIs as well.

Going for an HIV test can be stressful. As a couple, you can support each other through this process. There are other places that offer advice and support too, which we've listed on the back of this leaflet.



Build trust

The decision to abandon condoms in a relationship can be tricky. There are lots of things to think about and you both need to be happy with the decision, without either of you feeling pressured.

A healthy relationship is based on mutual trust and respect. We're all responsible for our own health and the health of our partners. So as part of your plan, you should agree whether you are both going to be monogamous or have sex with other guys. Either way, you need to be able to trust each other so neither of you has unprotected sex with other people. This can prevent one of you bringing HIV into the relationship. Talking openly with each other can help build and strengthen this trust. You may find it helpful to talk things through with a health advisor or counsellor. There's also a range of free courses in London that can help you to stay in control of the sex you have, deal with being positive or give you more information about HIV and safer sex. Details of where to find these are on the back of this leaflet.

Many men stick to their agreement with their boyfriend. Some men don't. It can take just one slip-up in the heat of the moment to put you both at risk.



Agree to be honest

Think about how you might cope if you or your boyfriend made a mistake. If you talk with each other about how you will address it before you ditch the condoms, it will make it a lot easier to own up and get back on track if one of you does fuck with someone else without condoms.

If you have agreed to have an open relationship, there is still a risk of you catching other STIs even if you always use condoms and lube outside the relationship. You might then pass on STIs to your partner. If you are in an open relationship, it is a good idea to go for regular check-ups to test for HIV and STIs as part of your plan.

Be certain

Remember, if you are not sure that ditching the condoms is the right decision, don't do it. If you have stopped using condoms and you ever doubt your decision, your HIV status, or the HIV status of your boyfriend, you have a right to go back to using condoms. You should also go for an HIV test if you think you may have put yourself at risk since your last HIV-negative test result.

Doctors have asked HIV-positive men when they thought they became infected. Roughly a third thought it was from fucking with a regular partner.

If you are going to have sex without a condom with your boyfriend, be warned that there are lots of risks involved. You need to come up with a plan first, which includes you both testing for HIV and other STIs.



There are many services in London that offer support to help you have safer sex.

Web: For information about HIV testing visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/testing.
For information about London's testing services visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/clinics.

For information about HIV and safer sex visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/sex.
For information about PEP, visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/pep.

Helplines: London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard: 020 7837 7324.
THT Direct: 0845 12 21 200.

One-to-one: Free counselling, mentoring and health trainer services are provided by the GMI Partnership. Call 020 8305 5002, email info@gmipartnership.org.uk or visit: www.gmipartnership.org.uk.

Groupwork: There are lots of different groups and courses in London offered by PACE, THT and GMFA. They are advertised regularly in the gay press or you can visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/gwk.

Booklets: Booklets offering sexual health information and advice can be picked up free from racks in gay venues across London, or visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/booklets.

Magazine: FS (the fit and sexy gay man's health magazine) is full of information and advice about sex, relationships, drugs and HIV. It is available free in gay venues every other month, or visit: www.gmfa.org.uk/fs.

Condoms and lube: You can get free condoms and lube in London from many gay bars, clubs and saunas. You can buy very good value condoms and lube online from: www.freedoms-shop.nhs.uk. Freedoms shop sells NHS-approved and subsidised condoms and lubricants in a discreet, confidential home delivery service.

To express your views on HIV services in London, visit www.ergoclear.com/express. This resource is produced by GMFA to support THT's mass media campaign and is funded by the Pan London HIV Prevention Programme.

GMFA projects are developed by positive and negative volunteers. To volunteer or donate, go to www.gmfa.org.uk or call 020 7738 6872. Charity no. 1076854.



06/2010