You know the different types of sexually transmitted infections and how they’re transmitted, so let’s talk about how you can prevent getting infected in the first place.

To review, most STIs are transmitted in three main ways: through blood, skin-to-skin contact, or sexual fluids like semen or vaginal fluids. It may be obvious to say, but the only way you can make sure you don’t come in contact with these STIs via sexual contact is to not have any sort of sexual contact to begin with. This includes non-penetrative sexual contact as well, because you only need to rub up against another body to transfer those skin-to-skin STIs.

The fact of the matter is that being sexually active comes with some inherent risk. We’re not trying to scare you; it’s just a fact of life. You can take action to reduce your risk in a number of ways, which we’ll cover in this lesson. When you know that you’re covering your bases, you’re less likely to feel anxious about the possibility of STIs or pregnancy, and more likely to feel relaxed, which most often leads to an increase in pleasure.
To reduce your risk of becoming infected with an STI, your safest harm-reduction methods are going to be condoms, dams, and gloves. These items create a barrier between you and your partner’s sexual fluids and skin. Let’s talk more in-depth about these methods.

**Community Resources**
Free safer sex supplies at the U of MN – SHADE Health Advocates

---

**Where did you learn how to use a condom or dental dam?**

**Video Transcript**
Ashlee: Oh my gosh, um, I learned how to use condoms and dental dams in 8th grade health class and it was so embarrassing.

Chris H: They had, like, a dildo in front of the class and he put a condom on it in front of all of us so that we could see how to do it.

Dan: Um, my friends mom was the teacher, and that could have been weird but she was actually really awesome and not that awkward, and I think she used a banana, or fingers, or something And my friends and I got a kick out of it.

K-anna: Um, they just showed us the video, like, this is a condom and it goes on the male's genitals, it was super basic.

Nolan: I went to a seminar on sex, and they discussed, I think it was like 14 steps to putting on a condom and that was really where I got my first extensive understanding of how a condom works.

Heather: When I first saw a condom, I don't know how old I was, it was probably high school and I think I just kind of ripped it open right away and like, unrolled it and I was like "oh my god", you know, "it's all sticky". I think it was just like with my friends, you know, something casual.

Chris H: I think by him being really nervous, it kind of made us nervous and uncomfortable It definitely made it more uncomfortable to watch and I feel like it was less beneficial maybe educationally Because you’re focusing on this guy being nervous the whole time, and you're thinking "why is he nervous?" "Should I feel nervous?"

Aoife: A lot of the classes didn’t really speak to gay students, often times they weren’t allowed to. And so it, I just kinda felt very disconnected like this doesn’t apply to me, I can’t learn that much from this.

Maddy: I remember the movie, Never Been Kissed, when they all had to take the bananas and like put it over the condom. That's kinda the stereotype.
Where did you learn how to use a condom or dental dam? Video Transcript Cont’d...

Laura: It’s a great scene, where her friend comes in and is mistaken for the sex ed teacher. So, they do this scene with the condom on the banana and so, that was where I first got my idea of how to use a condom.

Andrew: I learned about condoms, uh, the first time I was gonna have sex. I read the condom on how to put it on.

Robin: Recently, I participated in an event on campus, where somebody handed us a bag of condoms and dental dams. And we were like “play” and we literally were like putting them on our arm, and like, stretching them out so you can really see and really interact with the methods you’re going to be using.

Condoms come in a variety of materials, sizes, shapes, and styles.

There are two different types of condoms. The first is the external condom, which you’re more likely to hear referred to as the male or penetrative condom. The second is the internal condom, which you may hear referred to as the female, receptive, or bottom condom.

The external condom is rolled over the entire penis and is designed to contain the ejaculate at the end of the reservoir tip and protect the penis from exposure to STIs. It’s important to note that these condoms only protect what is covered, so the areas around the base of the penis, scrotum, thighs, and stomach are all still exposed to STIs that are transmitted via skin-to-skin contact. The same goes for the other person, as they are only protected from what is covered by the condom. While condoms reduce the surface area exposed, they do not eliminate the risk completely.

Condoms are made of a few different materials.
The most common material is latex. Latex provides that signature stretch to condoms, which makes it easier to accommodate a variety of penis sizes. If you’re using latex condoms, make sure to use a water or silicone-based lubricant only. Oil-based lubricants such as lotions, petroleum jelly, massage oil, or most things found in the kitchen, break down the latex and can create holes in the condom. Make sure to check the label on anything that you’re thinking of using as lube.

Some people have a latex allergy, so they have to use different types of condoms. If you think you might have a latex allergy, check in with your health
care provider. If your partner says they can’t use condoms because they have a latex allergy, there are other options available.

Resource
“The Origin of the Word ‘Condom’”

One alternative for people with latex allergies is synthetic condoms, which are made out of either polyurethane or polyisoprene. Compared to latex condoms, synthetic condoms are more expensive; however a benefit is that they transmit body heat better. While you can use oil-based lubricants with polyurethane condoms, you cannot use them with polyisoprene condoms. Polyurethane is not as stretchy as latex, while polyisoprene is stretchier and softer. Due to these different characteristics, we suggest that people test-drive these condoms solo before they pair up with a partner. It may take some time to get used to how they feel and move compared to latex.

The final main condom material is lambskin. Yes, like the name implies, these are made from an animal, sheep intestines to be exact. These are more expensive than other condoms. While they do work to prevent pregnancy, it’s important to note they do not prevent the transmission of STIs. Think about the what these condoms are made of, intestines. In the body, the intestines have to let certain things in and out. The pores of these condoms are small enough to prevent sperm from swimming through, but too big to stop viruses and other STIs.

How to Use an External Condom

**Video Transcript**

Scott Nason: Now, I’m gonna show you how to use an external condom. So, I brought my friend here, Babe. He’s gonna help gonna help us out. And I also brought 2 condoms. Now, there’s a few reasons why I would want to bring 2 condoms. 1 -- in case there’s something wrong with the condom I’m using. Maybe it’s past the expiration date or maybe there’s a hole or tear in it. And then also, if I’m gonna be changing sexual acts, I’m gonna want to use a different condom or if I’m changing sexual partners, I’m gonna want to use a different condom as well.

So, before we even open the condom, there’s 2 things you wanna check. You’re gonna want to check the expiration date, because after that date, the lubricant can start to crystalize and the condom can start to lose its integrity. It looks like we’re good to go. And then also, you’re gonna want to check to make sure that there’s no tears in the condom packaging. Because if there’s tears in the packaging, there’s probably going to tears in the condom as well. So, you just want to gently press the
How to Use an External Condom Video Transcript cont’d…
Scott Nason: ... condom, and kind of feel a push back. Make sure that there's an air pocket inside, and then you're good to go. When you open the condom, you're gonna want to push the condom to the side. And that's really easy to do with lubricated condoms. They just kind of slip and slide everywhere. You can push it to the side and gently open the packaging using your fingers. You're not gonna want to use anything sharp like scissors or anything you have on hand, like a machete. You're just gonna want to use your fingers. And you get the condom out. Now, you're gonna want to make sure which way the condom unrolls. And I like to use something called the Sombrero test. You just put it on your finger and if it looks like a Sombrero, you're good to go. It's really easy to tell when it's about inches away from your face. It might be hard to see farther away. And then, if it's the wrong way, it kind of looks like a dome. It doesn't look like a Sombrero anymore. So, Sombrero: you're good to go.
Now, you're gonna want to check which way it unrolls because if you put it on the wrong way, and then flip it over, anything that is on the outside of the penis is now on the outside of the condom, about to be inserted into the partner. So you definitely want to check to see which way it unrolls before you put it on. Now, I also like to advise maybe you can add a few drops of lubricant on the inside and outside of the condom to increase pleasure. That's definitely okay. You just don't want to add too much that it kind of slips around while it's inside. So, you figure out which way it unrolls. You put it on the penis. And then this is one of the most important steps, you're gonna want to pinch the tip as you roll the condom down. Now, you want to pinch the tip to get any air out from the inside because it just will increase friction inside of the condom. Fun fact: sperm leaves the penis at 25 to 30 MPH. So, that's like driving down a residential road and hitting a balloon. You don't want the condom to break. Two things can't occupy the same space at the same time.
So, you're just gonna wanna then roll the condom down, making sure to get any air bubbles out that might be inside. You should have a little bit of slack room at the top for ejaculate to go. I know it might look silly to have slack on the end but it's going to be inside of someone. You're not going to see it anyways. So, once Babe is finished, Babe is gonna wanna hold onto the base as Babe pulls out. This is because not everyone stays as erect as Babe when they're finished. And it's really easy for the condom to just slip off and remain inside of the partner. And if that's the case and that happens, maybe you've just ruined all the reason why you wore a condom in the first place. And as the penis is out, then you can take the
How to Use an External Condom Video Transcript cont’d…
Scott Nason: ...condom off. And it’s really easy with a lubricated condom, you just kind of slide it off. The one I’m using right now is un-lubricated because I don’t want to get my hands full of lubricant. But you’re just gonna want to slide the condom off gently. So, now that the condom is off the penis, you’re just gonna want to tie it up in a knot to make sure nothing spills out, and then throw it away in the garbage. If you’re concerned about privacy, you can just wrap it in a tissue and throw it away. If someone finds it then, you have bigger issues because someone’s looking through your tissues. You’re not going to want to put the condom in the toilet; it doesn’t degrade. So, it might clog your toilets. And you’re not gonna wanna put it on your roommate’s bed. You’re not gonna wanna mail it to your roommate’s friends. Just throw it away, that’s the best thing to do with it.

How to use an external condom
1. Check the expiration date;
2. Examine the package for holes or tears, make sure it is sealed;
3. Remove the condom from the package. Make sure you don’t use scissors, your teeth, or anything sharp;
4. Apply a drop of lubricant on the outside and inside of the condom. While a little more may increase pleasure, too much can lead to condom slippage;
5. Figure out which way the condom rolls down;
6. Place the condom on the head of penis or dildo;
7. Pinch the reservoir tip and at the same time roll the condom down to the base of the penis or dildo. Make sure to smooth out any air bubbles;
8. Immediately after sexual activity has finished, hold on to the base of the condom and pull out; and,
9. Dispose of the condom in the trash. Do not reuse the condom.

Resource
How to use an external condom

How effective are condoms?
Well, that depends. Condoms are great at reducing the likelihood of STI transmission when used consistently and correctly every time. You may have heard that condoms have defects and aren’t reliable. In reality, condoms that are approved by the FDA go through rigorous testing before they are sold. Manufacturers test condoms by sending an electrical current through the
condom to detect any possible holes before they package them. Testing for water leaks and air bursts are other forms of condom quality assurance.

**How are condoms made?**
Curious about how condoms are made? Watch this interesting short video, **“Unrolled,”** or return to page 10 of the online to view it.

**The most common reason for condom failure is user error.**
If you think about the steps to putting on a condom, there are a variety of places where user error can occur.

- The condom might be expired or have a puncture in the packaging, thus compromising the integrity of the condom.
- If a user starts putting on the condom in the wrong direction, then flips it over the right way, they have potentially gotten pre-ejaculate on the side of the condom that is coming in contact with their partner.
- If a person started having sex, stopped, then put a condom on, they have already exposed themselves to skin and sexual fluids.
- If the reservoir tip is not pinched when the condom is put on, an increase in pressure at the head of the penis can cause breakage when ejaculation occurs.
- If the condom is not rolled all the way down to the base of the penis, it may start creeping up and can slip off.
- The same thing can happen if the penis and condom are not withdrawn immediately after ejaculation, before the penis gets flaccid.

The best way to prevent these errors is to practice putting on a condom before you become sexually active; don’t wait for on-the-job training. It’s important to know how to do this even if you don’t have a penis; it’s a shared responsibility. You can’t assume that every partner will know how to properly use one. Condoms can be used to protect sex toys that you want to share with partners. Also, knowing how to put a condom on your partner can be a sexy part of foreplay. Remember, if you’re switching between oral, vaginal, or anal sex, you need to put on a new condom. You don’t want to be introducing the stuff that was on the outside of the condom into another part of the body.
What are some hurdles or barriers to using condoms or dental dams?

Video Transcript

Maddy: The biggest hurdle like to using condoms, I think was not knowing which direction to fold down, to be really specific, so. And then also not knowing that you are supposed to hold the tip because then, air gets stuck in there and it can, has like a higher risk of popping or whatever.

Alejandra: If you have access to condoms, but they’re not the right size. Then, it might not be as effective.

Heather: Maybe they’re off on the other side of the room or you can’t get the wrapper open or you start putting it on backwards. I mean there are all these different things that practice maybe will, or just pure preparation before will get rid of. I think everyone experiences awkwardness.

Robin: If you wait until you’re in a sexual encounter to try and use a condom for the first time, there’s a lot of pressure. You’ve got a partner right there waiting, maybe you’re not sure which way it goes on. You can’t read that tiny print in the dark. It’s just not gonna happen.

Heather: The awkwardness comes from a lack of education or practice. I mean obviously the first time you do it, it’s your first time. It’s not going to go probably as well as you expect.

Devyn: It really doesn’t make any sense because in my opinion condoms and lube just make everything better. People have said that condoms make it less pleasurable for a person, specifically the person with the penis. But if you are using a lot of lube, the condom actually holds lube better than a penis does, and it makes sex better for that reason.

While most condoms will technically fit most people, certain condoms will be more comfortable. Finding condoms that you like can lead to a more pleasurable experience. There are literally hundreds of different condoms out there; it’s just a matter of trying them out. Width and length can vary by brand and style. There are even manufacturers that let people custom order condoms based on their particular measurements when erect. If you use condoms, try experimenting with how thick or thin the condom is. Thicker condoms can provide some benefit to sustain an erection longer, while thinner condoms may help to feel more heat or sensations. Some condoms will have certain design features like ribbing, studding, or extra room at the head of the condom. Flavored condoms are available for folks that aren’t fans of the taste of condoms with oral sex. Another option is to
use non-lubricated condoms, or pair them with flavored lubricant for oral sex. However, avoid using flavored condoms and lubricants in the vagina as they can lead to irritation and yeast infections. For the adventurous, there are glow-in-the-dark and colored condoms. Whatever condom you choose to use, be sure to check that it is FDA approved; novelty condoms are not intended for actual use.

**What is it like to buy safer sex supplies?**

**Video Transcript**

Luis: If I want to buy condoms, I walk in, grab it. No big deal. Yeah, it's a really simple process.

Danica: My boyfriend and my guy friends feel super weirded out when they go to the store, And I don't really care. But I think that's also just a personality thing. Some people just don't think it's a big deal and, I don't know, it's only awkward if you make it awkward.

Andrew: Nobody wants to be seen in the store looking at the condoms, trying to pick them out, and especially when you are new to sex, you don't know what you like, which ones to buy. You are sitting there just looking at condoms you think everyone, the whole world is looking at you and being like why is he over there, what's he doing? You don't want to go to the cash register and hand some old lady a box of condoms when you're maybe 16, 17, 18, because you just feel judged.

Chris P: I'm like a really cheap person and sometimes I'm like I don't want to pay all this money. I just want to use other forms of birth control that don't cost as much money up front.

Robin: 'Cause if you do just a little bit of research, like 2 minutes online, you could probably find a lot of resources to gain access to free or really reduced prices for dental dams and condoms.

Danica: Well, one time during the spring of my senior year, I was getting ready to graduate. And I was at, you know, the local Wal-Mart, and in my really small town. And I was buying a couple things, but I was also buying condoms. And I ran into my like 70-year-old history teacher in one of the aisles, and she was like politely saying, "Hi". I just felt so awkward, and—in reality, she definitely was not looking at what I had in my basket. She didn't care, and I was definitely overthinking the situation because nobody really cares, but you.

Andrew: Often, when you need condoms, and me being a procrastinator and never being prepared, you often need them at the last second. It's late and you go to the pharmacy and a lot of times the pharmacies have them behind the counters, and they are all locked up or in some kind of locked case, and no one with a key is around.
What is it like to buy safer sex supplies? Video Transcript Cont’d…
Heather: Well, when I started off being a health advocate, I kept all the condoms in my room. People would knock on my door, and it’d be either a shy guy not looking me in the eye, like, "I need a condom," you know. I’d give him some or it’d be like a group of like 4 guys being like, "We need 6 condoms each, you know, haha." You know there would sometimes be girls too, like, "I need a condom," but it almost seems like for the guys, they’d be nervous or they’d be maybe like compensating for their nervousness by trying to be boastful of themselves.

The internal condom is designed to be inserted into the vagina during penetrative vaginal sex.

It is comprised of a sheath of soft synthetic material, either nitrile or polyurethane, and contains a flexible internal ring at the closed end, and an external ring at the base of the condom. It creates a barrier to the vagina and a portion of the vulva, which provides greater protection from STIs as compared to external condoms. Users squeeze the internal ring and insert the condom inside the vagina, where the muscles at the top of the vagina hold the ring in place. The base of the condom should hang out of the vagina and cover some of the vulva. The external ring has the added benefit of rubbing against the clitoris to provide added sensation.

A lot of lubricant should be used with the internal condom since it is made out of a synthetic material. Do not use an external and internal condom at the same time! Another note, if there is a penis involved, make sure that it’s actually going in the condom and not around the side, which is a common user error. Stop and readjust if you notice the base of the condom is moving inside the body. When sexual activity has finished, make sure to twist the base of the condom to seal it off before you pull it out of the vagina; this will prevent any spillage. Internal condoms can be inserted up to 8 hours before sexual activity, so if you’re worried about it interrupting sex, worry no more!

While not originally designed for this purpose, internal condoms can be used for anal sex.
Like the vagina, the receptive partner can squeeze the inner ring and insert it into the anus past the sphincter and leave the end sticking outside of the anus. You can keep the internal ring inside the sheath, or take it out depending on
comfort level. Some people use the internal ring to help with insertion and then take it out, while others take the ring out before insertion. It’s all a matter of what works best for each individual. Leaving the ring in or taking it out will alter how the condom moves inside the rectum; be conscious of speed and force in this circumstance. Note that the internal ring should not be removed if using the condom for vaginal sex.

While not currently on the market in the U.S., other countries have different models of internal condoms including ones that are made of latex. Keep an eye out for new developments.

How to use an internal condom

Video Transcripts

Scott Nason: Now, let's talk about the internal condom. This is what an internal condom looks like. But if you were getting it at the store, this is what the package looks like. Take it home, and before you're about to use it, make sure that there aren't any tears or rips in the packaging to make sure that it's still okay to use. Now, I've taken it out and washed it off. Typically, there's lube on the inside and the outside of the condom. But for demonstrative purposes, I just didn't want to get my hands dirty. It comes as a sheath, sort of like an oversized external condom. And there's also a ring inside, uh, to keep it in place during sexual activity. Now, the internal condom can be used for both vaginal and anal sex. And depending on what sexual activity you're going to use, you can keep the ring inside or take it out.

During vaginal sex, you're gonna wanna keep the ring inside. And to insert it, you're gonna wanna squeeze the ring and insert the condom inside of the vagina. Now, the ring is gonna hold the condom in place during sexual activity. So, it's important to keep it inside during vaginal sex. For anal sex, you can either keep the ring in or out, depending on your preference or your partner's preference. But you're just gonna want to insert it into the anus before engaging in sexual activity. Now, when using the internal condom, you want to be a little bit more cautious. You wanna make sure that either you or your partner isn't going around the condom but rather going into the condom. Because there's a lot of lubrication, it would be easy to miss the hole and accidentally go around the side, and that would be bad. Also, you want to make sure you're not pushing the condom into the vaginal or anus, which can happen. So you just want to make sure you're inserting into the condom, but you are not pushing it in. When you are removing the internal condom, you want to take the...
How to use an internal condom Video Transcript continued…
Scott Nason: …outside and twist it to close off anything that is inside the condom, like ejaculate. And then pull out. Once it’s out, you can wrap it in some tissue papers and throw it away.

How to use an internal condom
1. Check the expiration date;
2. Examine the package for holes or tears, make sure it is sealed;
3. Remove the condom from the package. Make sure you don’t use scissors, your teeth, or anything sharp;
4. Apply a few drops of lubricant on the outside and inside of the condom;
5. Squeeze the inner ring and slowly insert the condom into the vagina or anus. It should rest towards the top of the cervix in the vagina or past the sphincter in the anus;
6. Ensure that part of the condom hangs out of the body and covers part of the vulva or anus;
7. After sexual activity has finished, twist the outside ring to close off the condom; and,
8. Remove the condom from the body and dispose of it in the trash. Do not reuse the condom.

Resource
How to use an internal condom

What’s your favorite type of condom?
Video Transcript
Maddy: I like the colored ones, cause then they look balloon animals, sorry. I don’t really have a preference, I don’t really care cause it’s inside me so I can’t really see it.
Andrew: I really like the really thin lubricated condoms.
K-anna: (Laugh) I like the condoms that were the hot and cold, ones.
Danica: Any type of condom is a good condom.
Nolan: I like the condoms that have cool pictures on them um, because I just keep them around my apartment in case the opportunity arises and they are just kind of cool.
Heather: Lubrication over non-lubrication would be, ideal.
Robin: My favorite type of condom are the glow in the dark ones because it always makes me laugh and my partner and I are always really goofy and playful so when we bust those out it’s a, it’s a pretty fun time. (Laughter)
Dams are comprised of a thin rectangle or square of latex or polyurethane that is used to cover the vulva or anus during oral sex.

The purpose is to keep a barrier between the mouth and genitals to prevent STI transmission. Dams come in a variety of colors and scents to offer a more enjoyable experience than using plain latex. When using a dam, you can place a few drops of lubricant on your partner’s vulva or anus, then place the dam over their body and hold it in place. Don’t let the dam bunch up or move around too much; remember, the point is to not let what’s on one side of the dam come in contact with your mouth and vice-versa. You can use a marker to indicate which side should come in contact with the mouth and which side should be on the genitals.

Sometimes it can be hard to find dams where you would normally buy condoms. If that’s the case, you have two options. You can take a condom and carefully cut it up the side to create a square barrier. You could also take a latex or nitrile glove and stick your tongue through the thumb opening. Another option is to grab some plastic wrap from the kitchen and use that instead. Some styles of plastic wrap are designed with little pores in them to let steam through in the microwave, so don’t use this kind or it won’t prevent STI transmission.

How to Use a Dental Dam

Video Transcript

Scott Nason: Now, we’re going to be talking about dental dams. So, dental dams are a thin sheet of material that you can use to protect yourself against STI transmission during oral sex. And that includes oral sex on the vulva or the anus. And it’s really stretchy, so it can fit any size partner. Now, when you’re using it, you’re just gonna want to place it over the anus or the vulva. So, you’re going to want to use lube on the side of the anus or vulva, and then, on the oral side, it’s really your preference. So, you’re going to want to use this to prevent against STI transmission. But not as a way to prevent against pregnancy. You’re not gonna want to throw it on your penis and rubber band it. And when you’re using it, you just want to hold it in place so it doesn’t bunch up. And then also, if you’re using it on your partner, you don’t want to flip it around and use it on yourself. Because that’s not really going to prevent against STI transmission. Also, dental dams are a one-
**How to Use a Dental Dam Video Transcript Cont’d…**

Scott Nason: … time use. So, once you’re done with it, you just want to throw it away. If you and your partner want to swap places, you’re just gonna want to use a new dental dam, which is really easy. And if you don’t have a dental dam on you, but you still want to stay protected during oral sex, you can use a glove. You’re going to want to cut off the fingers. And then, cut up the side. And now, you can use the thumb of the glove as a holder for your tongue during oral sex. You can also use a condom as a dental dam. And to do so, you just want to take a scissors and cut one side of the condom. Then, carefully unroll the condom. And you have a makeshift dental dam.

**Where did you learn to use a dental dam?**

*Video Transcript*

Abby: That was something that I don’t remember ever learning in any sexuality education classes.

Heather: I remember like, holding it up and like reading it. And then, flipping it over and like, looking at the diagram. And I was like, I did not know this existed.

Nolan: I have not learned how to use a dental dam.

Chris P: Ah, but I've never used a dental dam and I don't probably even know how.

Aoife: I was never introduced to dental dams until college. I think a lot of people still don’t know what those are.

Andrew: The health advocate in my fraternity had dental dams. We really wanted to know what they were like. So, we tried them out -- not on each other. We just took them out and played with them a little bit. Well, first off, they tried to tell me that it was some kind of a fruit leather, and it smelled like strawberry or something like that. So, I took a bite out of it, and it didn’t taste very good.

Devyn: Dental dams I didn’t actually hear about until coming to college, which I’m really sad about because dental dams are really amazing, especially for giving head to somebody with a vagina or giving somebody a rim job.

Janelle: I learned how to use a dental dam through research from the Internet. And then I learned about it at a progressive sex toy shop that I went into and just asked the educator there, point-blank how to use it.
Where did you learn to use a dental dam? Video Transcript continued… and what that meant. And what the difference between a dental dam was and like, cling wrap. And what-- how they worked and things like that.

Finally, latex or nitrile gloves can be used to protect your hand from sexual fluids, skin, or blood.

They are especially helpful if you have a cut or gash on your hand that you want to make sure is not exposed to bacteria or viruses. These are also helpful if a person has longer fingernails. Ask your partner if they would like you to use lube.

**Lubricant is used to make sexual activity more comfortable and pleasurable.**

Most condoms come pre-lubricated with a water or silicone-based lube. Adding more on the inside and outside can make the experience more enjoyable for both partners.

Water-based lubricant is water-soluble, which means it dissolves in water. These lubes tend to absorb into the skin and may need to be reactivated during sex play with a little bit of saliva, water, or more lube. If you’re planning on having shower or hot tub sex, this lube is not the right choice because it will dissolve.

As was stated earlier, oil-based lubricants should be restricted to use with polyurethane condoms because they will break down latex and polyisoprene. These lubes are great for some solo masturbation if you have a penis.

Silicone-based lubes have the benefit of being longer-lasting in comparison to water-based products and provide a more slippery feel. One thing to keep in mind is that silicone-based lubes are more likely to stain your sheets, so you might want to throw a towel down if you’re worried about that. A caution, do not use silicone-based lube with your silicone sex toys. This can cause your toys to start eroding, and no one wants to see a good sex toy go to waste!
Vaccines are another form of prevention for some sexually transmitted infections.

Vaccines work by building antibodies to infections, which means that your body will have an easier time fighting off infection if it ever comes in contact with the virus. There are vaccines for HPV, and hepatitis A & B.

**There are two HPV vaccines available in the U.S.**

The first, Gardasil®, works by protecting against the strains most likely to cause cancers and the two strains most likely to cause genital warts. The second, Cervarix®, protects against the strains most likely to cause cancer, but offers no genital wart protection. It doesn’t matter if you have a cervix or not, an HPV vaccine is recommended for all people ages 9-26. If you’re not in that age range, insurance will probably not cover the vaccine, but your provider may still recommend this form of prevention. The HPV vaccine is administered over the course of three doses. The second dose is given two months after the first. The third dose is given four months after the second dose. So the entire process should take six months. It’s very important to make sure you get all three doses so that you are fully protected! Because this is a newer vaccine there aren’t long-term studies that go back decades to document the history of its effectiveness. At this point, the vaccines are said to provide protection for 5-6 years, but future research may show that it actually lasts longer.¹ ²

**The second vaccine is for hepatitis.**

There are vaccines for both the A and B strain of the virus. The HBV vaccine is very common and many students are actually required to receive it before they are enrolled in school. Like the HPV vaccine, it’s administered over the course of three shots. The second is given a month after the first, and the third is given five months after the second, for a six-month total. The HAV vaccine is a two-shot series that is available to those 18 and older. There is also a combo vaccine that protects against both the A and B strains and requires only three shots.³

**While not a typical method of prevention, post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, provides protection from infection after someone has come in contact with blood, breast milk, or sexual fluids that transmit HIV.**

If a person is having sex with someone who is HIV positive and the condom breaks, they can start these meds within 72 hours to prevent the development of antibodies, also known as
seroconversion, from happening. Really, the sooner the better, and the closer a person gets to that 72-hour mark, the less effective the treatment will be. A person would start the traditional HIV treatment, HAART, for a course of 28 days.¹

The other form of HIV prevention involves the transmission from a mother to child. The likelihood of HIV infection is less than 2% if the infected mother is on antiretrovirals while pregnant and during delivery, and the child is put on these meds after they are born and is not breastfed.² Without those interventions, about 1 in 4 babies born to mothers with HIV will be infected.

Sex while using alcohol or other substances is another consideration of safer sex and harm reduction. There are many reasons why people use substances with sex. Some people believe that using substances will make it easier for them to open up, relax, and not worry about doing something wrong. For some substances, like stimulants, the belief is that the user will actually feel an increase in sensations, pleasure, and stamina. Others see using substances with sex as a way to escape or be numb during the experience.

---

Using substances and having sex

*Video Transcripts*

Devyn: In many scenarios, being under the influence of substance can limit a person's ability to give consent, and also to perform well in bed.

Maddy: I feel there's usually 3 different types that I personally see when people are using substances and sex at the same time. There's like the 'This is gonna make the sex better. It's gonna kind of allow us to proceed without feeling as nervous.'

Chris H: Things might be going faster than you want them to go, and you might not just be realizing it.

Heather: Men, sometimes, you know it's harder to get an erection if you've been drinking a lot and, you know, you might just be like too drunk bodies like flopping around. And that's not sexy at all.

Devyn: If I have a friend or a partner, and they have or are under the influence of something, I am much more hesitant to engage in any sort of sexual intercourse with them.

Maddy: The second thing is that usually people are making jokes about—like it gets borderline rape almost, is when they're talking about, "This is gonna allow me to have sex with this person easier."

Heather: If you're using alcohol as a way to like build up your confidence, you know, to sort of like get sex or, like liquid courage, then you should probably kind of step back and think why you're doing these things and why you feel like you need alcohol to get laid.
Sex and Using Substances Video Transcripts Cont’d...

Nolan: There are a lot of times I see people at the beginning of the night not even willing to talk to other people or a girl who, you know, just is stand-offish and by herself. And by the end of the night, she’s hanging out by all the guys or—same with the guys. There are some guys who would never talk and then, you get a few drinks in them, and they’re just getting wild. And I’ve seen it for both sides where at the next day, they come up and just say, “Dude, I did not wanna hook up with her,” or “I did not want to hook up with him.” And so even those people with those ideas that, “I didn’t want to hook up last night.” And they ended up hooking up, it just kind of shows you what alcohol can do.

Heather: It can be hard to say no to someone you’re in a relationship with. And when you add alcohol on top of that, it’s just like a huge mess.

Dan: They are less able to read queues, whether it’s verbal or non-verbal.

Maddy: I also see it, I mean it is also be just a way for people to loosen up and be able to talk with each other more.

Andrew: It can be liquid courage, but it can also be something that’s kind of, it’s kind of dangerous that they might cross some boundaries.

Ashlee: Things happen and we’re not really thinking straight when we’re drunk. So it’s just, everything about sex is gonna be more difficult and more of at-risk.

Those decreased inhibitions can make it harder to make decisions and you might do something that you may not feel great about when sober. It’s also more difficult to give a clear and enthusiastic yes to consent to sex. Coordination can be affected and it can be more difficult to properly use condoms, dams, or contraception. In addition, you may be less likely to be concerned about using protection or worrying about contraception. Depressants decrease nerve sensitivity and can make it more difficult to feel pleasure or orgasm. Ever heard of the phrase whisky dick? Depressants, like alcohol, move blood flow away from the extremities and to the internal organs, making it difficult to achieve and maintain an erection.
How alcohol affects sexual pleasure

Video Transcript

Nolan: So, when I was a freshman, I ended up joining a fraternity, and I ended up moving into the house. And so, one weekend we were having a party, and I asked my best buddy to come over, and he kind of came over with the idea that, "Oh dude, there's going to be so many chicks here, like this is a fraternity!" and I just kind of went, "OK, yeah. There are going to be some girls here but." To me, the essential component of the night was just to hang out with my buddies and have a good time. Later that night, he comes up to me and says, "Dude, can I use a condom?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah, absolutely." And he said, "Oh, can I use your bed, too?" And I was like, "Alright dude, you've got my blessing." I think it was half-hour to 45 minutes later, he comes downstairs and just hanging his head, shakes his head. I asked him, "Dude, what's going on?" He just looked me in the eye and said, "Whiskey dick."

If you choose to use substances and get it on, here are some ways you can reduce your risk of negative consequences.

Keep in mind, we are not condoning underage drinking or the use of illegal substances, but we do recognize that some people will use these substances regardless of their legality.

The first strategy is to decide on a set limit of alcohol or substance you will use and not exceed that amount.

A good rule of thumb is get to the point where you feel a buzz or mild high, but not to the point where you feel drunk, stoned, or out of your mind high. This will keep you at a level where you have a bit of coordination and are more conscious of your decisions. You'll also keep yourself at a place where your nerve endings are still able to feel some sensations.

The second strategy is to make sure you're already taking care of your barriers and contraception.

Carry condoms or dams with you if you're going out, or have them next to your nightstand if you're staying at your place. If you have them around, you're more likely to use them. If you're a practiced pro at properly using a condom and could do it blindfolded sober, you're less likely to have errors while using substances. If you're using a method of contraception that you can put in hours ahead of time, like the internal condom,
cap, diaphragm, or sponge, do it before you start using substances. More details about these methods are addressed the contraception lesson.

**Finally, be vocal!**
While it can be fun to be loud, we’re actually referring to communication with your partner. Know that even if you start getting hot and heavy, you can change your mind at any point. It may be more difficult to pick up on body language when someone is using, so be conscious to not solely rely on these cues. Checking in often verbally is just as important as interpreting physical cues. Again, know your limits and know when you or your partner is not sober enough to fully consent.

**Community Resources**
Free safer sex supplies at the U of MN – [SHADE](http://www.shadehealth.org)
[Health Advocates](http://www.healthadvocates.org)

Information in these course lessons is provided for educational purposes. It is not meant to and cannot substitute for advice or care provided by an in-person medical professional. The information contained herein is not meant to be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease, or for prescribing any medication. You should always consult your own healthcare provider if you have a health problem or medical condition.

Lesson content created by the Rothenberger Institute in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota. © 2017 Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.

---