

# Your sexual health

Where to go for help and advice

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## What is this booklet about?

This booklet explains where you can get help and advice if:

- you need contraception
- you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection
- you're planning to become pregnant
- you are pregnant and are not sure you want to have a baby
- you want to find out more about abortion
- you're having problems with your sex life
- you have been sexually assaulted.

## Who can help me with my sexual health?

- General practices.
- Contraception clinics.
- Sexual health clinics.
- Sexually transmitted infection testing clinics (genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics).
- Pharmacies.
- Specialist sexual assault centres.

Sexual health clinics are clinics that provide contraception *and* infection testing services.

## How can I find where my nearest service is?

- You can find out about all sexual health services from **sexual health direct**, run by FPA, on 0845 122 8690 or at [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk).
- You can find details of general practices and pharmacies in England at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and in Wales at [www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk). In Scotland you can find details of general practices at [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk). In England and Wales you can call **NHS Direct** on 0845 46 47 and in Scotland **NHS 24** on 08454 24 24. In Northern Ireland call the FPA helpline on 0845 122 8687 or for details of general practices see [www.healthandcareni.co.uk](http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk).
- You can also get details of your nearest contraception, GUM or sexual health clinic from your local directory, health centre, local pharmacy, hospital, midwife, health visitor or advice centre.

- You can get details of young people's services from **Brook** on 0808 802 1234, or at [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk).

## Q Who can use these services?

**A** Anyone can use these services, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, religion, whether you are male, female, straight, gay or bisexual. Some services hold separate sessions for men, women, young people, gay men and lesbians.

## Q Are these services confidential?

**A** Yes, all the services discussed in this booklet are confidential. This means that your personal information, any information about your visit and the tests and treatments that you've had will not be shared with anyone outside that service without your permission. Even if you are under 16 you have the same right to confidentiality as anyone else. Don't be afraid to ask if you are not sure who will see your information.

Health professionals may need to involve other services if they believe you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (such as physical or sexual abuse). They will discuss this with you.

## Q What will happen when I go to one of these services?

**A** This will depend on which service you use but may include the following:

- You will normally be asked to fill in a form with your name and address if it's the first time you've used the service.
- At contraceptive services you may be asked questions about your medical and sexual history. If you choose certain methods of contraception you will need to have an internal examination, have your blood pressure taken or may be offered a test for sexually transmitted infections.
- If you are going for a check-up for sexually transmitted infections you will be asked questions about your sex life. See *How will I be tested for sexually transmitted infections?* on page 12.
- If you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, support will be available to help you tell a sexual partner(s) to get a check-up too.
- Abortion services will ask you about your medical history and help you decide which method of abortion to have. They may offer you a test for sexually transmitted infections. If necessary they will do a scan to see how pregnant you are, and a blood test.
- If you have been sexually assaulted you may be offered a more specialist service. They can also help you report the assault to the police, if you choose to.

It's fine to take a friend with you for support. If you need to have an examination you should be offered a chaperone. This means that someone else can be with you when you have the examination.

## Q What if I have special requirements?

**A** Everyone has a right to access health services. If you have special requirements (such as a disability or if English is not your first language) contact the general practice or clinic in advance to make sure it can meet your needs. In some circumstances you may be able to be seen at home.

## Q How can I make a complaint if I'm not happy with the service?

**A** If you are not happy with the NHS service you have received you have the right to make a complaint through the NHS complaints procedure (see [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)). You can also get information and help from **The Patients Association, Helpline** 0845 608 4455, [www.patients-association.com](http://www.patients-association.com) or from your local **Patient Advice Liaison Service** (see [www.pals.nhs.uk](http://www.pals.nhs.uk)). See your local directory, or ask at the service you attended.

## Contraception services

This section explains the choices you have to help you find the contraception service that's most suitable for you.

## Q Is contraception free and where can I go to get it?

**A** You can obtain **free** contraception, including emergency contraception, from:

- a general practice, unless they say they don't provide contraception services
- a contraception clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- a young people's service (these will have an upper age limit)
- some GUM clinics.

You can also get free emergency contraception from:

- most NHS walk-in centres (England only) and minor injuries units
- some hospital accident and emergency departments (phone first to check)
- some pharmacies (there may be an age limit).

Contraception is free even if your service gives you a prescription to take to the pharmacy.

Some pharmacists are able to provide a range of sexual health services including contraception. If you are 16 or over you can buy the emergency pill from most pharmacies for around £25. They also sell condoms, diaphragms, caps and spermicide.

## Q Do services supply all methods of contraception?

**A** There are many different methods of contraception available. Health professionals can talk to you about them to help you choose the one that is best for you. They can also talk to you about safer sex. Not all services supply all methods but they should be able to give you information about what contraceptive methods there are and where you can go to get them.

You can get information on each method of contraception from FPA (see back cover).

## Q What other services are available?

**A** Contraception clinics sometimes provide far more than contraception. This may include:

- pre-pregnancy advice/pregnancy testing
- help and advice on an unplanned pregnancy (including abortion, adoption and continuing the pregnancy)
- safer sex advice
- advice on sexual problems
- cervical screening tests and breast awareness
- checks for sexually transmitted infections
- menopause advice
- infertility advice.

## What if I need emergency contraception?

If you have had sex without using contraception, or think your method might have failed there are different types of emergency contraception you can use.

- The emergency contraceptive pill, Levonelle – must be taken up to three days (72 hours) after sex. It is more effective the earlier it is taken after sex. It is available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy.
- The emergency contraceptive pill, ellaOne – must be taken up to five days (120 hours) after sex. It is only available with a prescription.
- An emergency IUD – must be fitted up to five days after sex, or up to five days after the earliest time you could have released an egg (ovulation).

Ask your doctor or nurse about getting emergency pills in advance, just in case you need them.

## Sexually transmitted infection services

This section explains where you can get help and advice if you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection or would like a check-up.

## Q What is a sexually transmitted infection?

**A** Some infections can pass to another person through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, by genital contact and through sharing sex toys. Infections spread in this way are known as sexually transmitted infections.

Safer sex involves using condoms correctly every time you have sex. If you don't use a condom you are more at risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

You don't need to have lots of sexual partners to get an infection.

## Q Can they be treated?

**A** Most sexually transmitted infections can be treated and it is usually best if treatment is started as soon as possible. Some infections, such as HIV, genital warts and genital herpes, never leave the body but there are drugs available that can reduce the symptoms. Drugs can also help prevent or delay the development of complications in HIV. If left untreated, many sexually transmitted infections can be painful or uncomfortable, and can permanently damage your health and fertility, and can be passed on to someone else.

## Q How will I know if I have an infection?

**A** Not everyone who has a sexually transmitted infection has signs and/or

symptoms. Sometimes these don't appear for weeks or months and sometimes they go away, but you can still have the infection and pass it on to someone else. If you experience any of the following you should seek advice:

- unusual discharge from the vagina
- discharge from the penis
- pain or burning when you pass urine
- itches, rashes, lumps or blisters around the genitals or anus
- pain and/or bleeding during sex
- bleeding between periods (including women who are using hormonal contraception)
- bleeding after sex
- pain in the testicles
- pain in the lower abdomen.

Even if you don't have any signs and/or symptoms you may wish to seek advice if:

- you have had unprotected sex with a new partner recently
- you or a sexual partner have sex with other people without using a condom
- a sexual partner has any symptoms
- you are planning a pregnancy and may have been at risk of infection.

## Q Where can I go if I am worried I might have an infection?

**A** You can get all tests and treatments at a GUM or sexual health clinic. General practices, contraception clinics, young people's services and some pharmacies may also provide testing for some infections. If they can't provide what you need, they will be able to give you details

of the nearest service that can.

All advice, information and tests are free, but if you go to a general practice you may have to pay a prescription charge for any treatment.

## Q How will I be tested for sexually transmitted infections?

A Tests for both men and women may include:

- An examination of your genitals, mouth, anus and skin to look for obvious signs of infection.
- Testing a sample of your urine.
- Having blood taken.
- Taking swabs from the urethra (tube where you urinate) and any sores or blisters.
- Taking swabs from the throat and the rectum. This is less common.

In women the tests might also include:

- Taking swabs from the vagina and cervix (entrance to the uterus).
- Having an internal examination.

## Q What will I be tested for?

A You will not automatically be tested for all infections. All tests are optional and should only be done with your permission. Sometimes you will get the results straightaway, and sometimes you will have to wait. The service will explain how you will get the results.

You can also get information about sexually transmitted infections from FPA (see back cover)

## Q What other services do GUM and sexual health clinics provide?

A Other services available may include:

- sessions for people who have been sexually assaulted
- psychosexual counselling (to help with sexual problems)
- hepatitis B vaccination
- post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)
  - a short course of anti-HIV drugs for people who may have recently come into contact with HIV.

## How can I protect myself against sexually transmitted infections?

- Use male or female condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- If you have oral sex, cover the penis with a condom or the female genitals and male or female anus with a latex or polyurethane square.
- If you are not sure how to use condoms correctly contact FPA (see back cover).
- Avoid sharing sex toys. If you do share them, wash them or cover them with a new condom before anyone else uses them.

## Planning a pregnancy

If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, this section can tell you where to go for help and advice.

## Q Why do I need to plan for pregnancy?

A Both women and men need to be as healthy as possible before trying for a baby. There are services that can give you more information and advice about:

- stopping your contraception
- healthy eating and exercise
- taking folic acid
- smoking, alcohol and recreational drug use
- whether any medicines you are taking are unsafe during pregnancy
- getting a test to see whether you are immune to rubella (German measles)
- getting tested for sexually transmitted infections.

You can get information and advice from a general practice, contraception clinic, young people's service, sexual health clinic, pharmacist or FPA (see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3). Also see the FPA booklet *Planning a pregnancy*.

## Q What should I do once I am pregnant?

A You will need to make an appointment to see a doctor so that you can get the antenatal care you need. If you are not already registered with a general practice see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3.

The following organisations may also be of help when you are planning a pregnancy and once you are pregnant:

- **Tommy's**, Pregnancy line: 0800 0147 800. [www.tommys.org](http://www.tommys.org).
- **NHS Smokefree** Helpline: 0800 022 4332. <http://smokefree.nhs.uk>.
- **Frank** – information and help for drug and alcohol users. Helpline: 0800 776 600. [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com).

## Unplanned pregnancy

This section explains where you can go for help and advice if you are pregnant and are not sure you want a baby.

## Q I think I might be pregnant – what should I do?

A If you think you could be pregnant you should do a pregnancy test as soon as possible. You can buy a test to do yourself from the pharmacy or supermarket, or you can ask for a test at your general practice, any young people's service, a contraception or sexual health clinic, a pharmacy (there may be a charge), most NHS walk-in centres (England only) and GUM clinics.

You can carry out a pregnancy test from the first day of a missed period. Tests that are done earlier than this may not be accurate. If you don't have regular periods, the earliest time to do a test is three weeks (21 days) from the last time that you had unprotected sex.



## Q I've had a positive pregnancy test – what are my choices?

**A** If the test is positive, this means you are pregnant. All pregnancy tests, when carried out correctly, are reliable, including tests you do yourself. You now need to think about what you want to do. You can choose to:

- continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted.

## Q What should I do if I decide to continue with the pregnancy?

**A** You will need to make an appointment to see a doctor so that you can get the antenatal care you need. If you are not already registered with a general practice see *How can I find where my nearest service is?* on page 3.

For more information about pregnancy care see *Planning a pregnancy* on page 13.

If you think you want to have the baby adopted, find out about this as soon as you can so that you can get the right information and support. Contact the **British Association for Adoption and Fostering**. 020 7421 2600, [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk).

## Q What should I do if I want an abortion?

**A** There are many reasons why some women feel that they are unable to continue with the pregnancy. For more information see *Abortion services* below.

## Q Who can help me with my decision?

**A** Ultimately the decision about what to do is yours. Talking to people you trust and having accurate information can help. You may wish to talk to family and friends or it might be easier to talk to someone who is not so close to you. Your general practice, contraception clinic, young people's service and FPA can talk to you about how you feel about the pregnancy and the choices you have (see also the FPA booklet *Pregnant and don't know what to do?*). You can also discuss your options with other services but they will charge a fee (see page 18).

## Abortion services

This section explains where to go for help and advice if you are pregnant and want an abortion.

## Q Who can have an abortion?

**A** Abortion is legal in the UK regardless of your age. How easy it is to arrange an abortion can vary throughout the UK, and it can be very difficult to get an abortion in Northern Ireland.

Legal abortion is safer and easier the earlier it is done in pregnancy. If you think you may wish to have an abortion it is important to get advice as soon as possible.

You can get information on what happens when you have an abortion, from FPA (see back cover for details), the **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** ([www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)) and the organisations listed below.

[www.calthorpe-clinic.co.uk](http://www.calthorpe-clinic.co.uk).

● **South Manchester Private Clinic.**

Tel: 0845 359 6666. [www.smpclinic.co.uk](http://www.smpclinic.co.uk).

Be aware that some organisations may not offer unbiased pregnancy counselling or advice and may lead women into making the wrong choice for them.

## Sexual problems

This section explains where to go for help and advice if you are having sexual problems.

### Q Where can I go if I want an abortion?

**A** Abortion care is available free through the NHS, or through other clinics and hospitals for a fee (the cost will vary).

- You can go to your general practice, local contraception or sexual health clinic or young people's service. They can refer you for an abortion through the NHS (see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3).
- Women in Northern Ireland can contact the FPA unplanned pregnancy service on 0845 122 8687. They will be able to advise you about getting a private abortion in England if that is what you decide to do.
- You can contact organisations directly that provide abortions for a fee – you do not need to be referred by another service. These include:
  - **bpas.** Helpline: 0845 730 4030. [www.bpas.org](http://www.bpas.org).
  - **Marie Stopes.** Helpline: 0845 300 8090. [www.mariestopes.org](http://www.mariestopes.org).
  - **Calthorpe Clinic.** Tel: 0845 459 6060.

### Q What is a sexual problem?

**A** Sometimes both men and women can have problems that affect their sex life. These include:

- loss of interest in sex
- being unable to get or keep an erection
- premature ejaculation (coming too soon)
- pain during sexual intercourse or difficulty with penetration
- difficulty having an orgasm.

### Q Why do sexual problems occur?

**A** Sexual problems can have physical or psychological causes, sometimes both. Physical reasons include illness, infection or side effects from medications. Psychological causes can be linked to relationship difficulties, uncertainties about your sexuality,

and previous sexual experiences. Many sexual problems are temporary.

## Q Where can I go for help and advice?

A The first step is to talk to someone about your problem. This could be at your general practice, contraception, GUM or sexual health clinic or a helpline.

Some contraception services and some GUM and sexual health clinics offer psychosexual counselling. Your general practice may also be able to refer you to a counsellor on the NHS, but there might be a waiting list. The following organisations have useful information and can help you access relationship and psychosexual counselling. They will charge a fee – you can phone them to find out the cost.

- **Relate.** Tel: 0300 100 1234.  
[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk).
- **College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists.** Tel: 020 8543 2707.  
[www.cosrt.org.uk](http://www.cosrt.org.uk).
- **Sexual Advice Association.** Helpline: 0207 486 7262. [www.sda.uk.net](http://www.sda.uk.net).

## Sexual assault services

This section explains where you can go for help and advice if you have been sexually assaulted.

## Q What is sexual assault?

A Sexual assault is any kind of sexual activity that you do not agree to. It can include:

- inappropriate touching
- vaginal, oral or anal penetration that you have said no to
- rape.

Sexual assault can happen to men or women of any age. The attacker may be male or female, a stranger or someone you know, and a sexual assault can take place anywhere, including in your home or workplace.

## Q Where can I go for help if I've been sexually assaulted?

A Being sexually assaulted can be a very distressing and frightening experience. This can make it hard to get the help you need, but there are services that can help. You do not have to tell anyone about the assault if you don't want to, but you should seek medical advice as soon as possible as you may be at risk of a sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy.

The services listed below can provide medical care, will take you seriously and will help you get any other support you need (including emotional support). These services are free – you can go there without a referral from another service and they will not tell the police if you do not want them to.

- A sexual assault referral centre – a 24-hour

one-stop specialist service where you can receive medical care and counselling.

- A GUM clinic.
- A hospital accident and emergency department.
- Your general practice.
- A contraception or young people's service.

See How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3.

## Q What will happen if I report the assault to the police?

**A** If you decide to tell the police, you will be seen by a specially trained police officer and a specially trained doctor.

## Q Who else can help me?

**A** The following organisations can also give you details of services you might need and may be able to provide some counselling and support. If the assault took place a long time ago they can still help you:

- **Rape Crisis** (in England and Wales).  
[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk). 0808 802 9999
- **Rape Crisis Scotland**. Tel: 08 088 01 03 02.  
[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk).
- **Rape Crisis Northern Ireland**.  
Tel: 028 9032 9002.
- **Rape Crisis Network Ireland**. Tel: 1800 77 88 88. [www.rcni.ie](http://www.rcni.ie).
- **Survivors UK** (for men and boys who have been sexually assaulted). Helpline:  
0845 122 1201. [www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org).

- **Rights of Women** (runs a Sexual Violence Legal Advice line). Tel: 020 7251 8887.  
[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk).

The Sexual Health Information Line, provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is **0800 567 123** and the service is available from Monday to Friday from 9am - 8pm and at weekends from 11am - 4pm.

For additional information on sexual health visit [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

Information for young people can be found on [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)

## Clinics

To locate your closest clinic you can use the *find a clinic iPhone* app.

You can find details of general practices and pharmacies in England at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) and in Wales at [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk). In Scotland you can find details of general practices at [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk) and in Northern Ireland [www.healthandcareni.co.uk](http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk).

# A final word

This booklet can only give you general information.

**Remember** – contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.



talking sense about sex



[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

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