

## Safe Sex for Older Adults

Many older adults are remaining or becoming sexually active. This is because of better health among older adults, longer lifespans, more open attitudes toward sexuality, internet dating, and the availability of medications like Viagra and estrogen products. Sex can still be satisfying but will be different from younger years, and might need to be adapted for current age, disability, illness, or surgery-induced body changes. Older adults are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than younger adults. Everyone should use safe sex practices.

**Here are 4 tips on having and enjoying safe sex, no matter what your age.**

### **Do a background and body check**

Know your partner's sexual background before having oral, vaginal, or anal sex. All types of sex can spread STIs. Talk about your sexual histories, any past STIs, results of STI testing, and whether either of you has ever injected illegal drugs. (Besides sex, HIV/AIDS can also be acquired by sharing syringe needles.) Before having sex, check your partner's penis or vaginal area for sores, abnormal discharges, or odors.

### **Consider getting tested first**

The best way to protect yourself and your partner is for the two of you to get tested for HIV and other STIs before you start having sex. A person can have an STI and not know it because the symptoms are not obvious. And some symptoms of STIs or HIV, such as tiredness, can be mistaken for age-related health problems.

### **Use a condom and lubricant**

Use one condom and lubricant every time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex, including during foreplay, until you know your partner's sexual history, STI status, and are in a sexually exclusive relationship. Using water-based lubricants such as K-Y Jelly and Astroglide is important because they can lower the chances of getting a sore or tiny cut on the penis or inside the vagina. These sores and cuts can increase the risk of getting STIs. Do not use Vaseline or mineral oil with condoms because it destroys the condom lining. Put the condom on after the penis is erect, leaving a 1/2 inch space at the tip. Hold the condom at the base (open end) as you remove it. Do not use the same condom twice. Do not use expired condoms.



**Need a guide or refresher on how to put on a condom? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has you covered. Check out their illustrated step-by-step guide to safe condom use: <https://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/male-condom-use.html>**

### **Talk to your healthcare provider**

Your healthcare provider can offer additional advice about protecting yourself from STIs and when sex is safe with certain medical conditions such as after a heart attack. Your provider can also recommend treatments for common sexual problems such as vaginal dryness and erectile dysfunction (difficulty getting an erection, also known as ED). They can also recommend treatments for conditions that can affect your sex life, such as incontinence.

Effective treatments for vaginal dryness include over-the-counter moisturizers, lubricants, and prescription estrogen creams, tablets, and rings that you insert vaginally.

ED increases with age, but it is not always a part of growing older. ED can be due to medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes or emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress. It can also be due to side effects from medications such as antidepressants or high blood pressure drugs, as well as alcohol use.

Because ED may be the first sign of an underlying medical condition, talk to your healthcare provider if you experience this problem. Medications exist to help resolve ED problems. Before using ED medications and over the counter and herbal sex aids, make sure to discuss them with your provider or pharmacist.