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Safe Sex for Seniors

In today's day and age, with more open attitudes toward sexuality, better health among older adults, Internet dating, and the availability of medications like Viagra, many older adults are remaining sexually active. Unfortunately, older people are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) than younger adults. For older people its of the utmost importance to make sure you're practicing safe sex. Here are 4 tips on having and enjoying safe sex, no matter what your age.

DO A BACKGROUND CHECK

Know your partner's sexual background before having oral, vaginal or anal sex. (All types of sex can spread STDs.) Talk about your sexual histories, and tell one another whether you've ever been tested for STDs, what the results of testing were, and whether you've ever injected illegal drugs. HIV/AIDS can also be spread via shared hypodermic needles, though the most common risk factor for older women is sex with an infected man.

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 STDs before you start having sex. Ask potential partners if they have recently been tested for HIV and encourage partners who have not been tested to get tested. STDs don't always cause obvious symptoms. And some symptoms of STDs or HIV, such as fatigue, can be mistaken for age-related health problems.

USE A CONDOM AND LUBRICANT

Use a condom and lubricant every time you have sex until you are in a monogamous relationship and know your partner's sexual history and status. Lubricants such as KY Jelly are important because they can lower the odds of getting a sore or tiny cut on the penis or inside the vagina. These sores and cuts can boost risks of getting STDs.

TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

Your healthcare provider can offer additional advice about protecting yourself from STDs. He or she can also recommend treatments for common sexual problems such as vaginal dryness and erectile dysfunction (ED).

There are effective treatments for vaginal dryness, which range from over-the-counter moisturizers and lubricants to estrogen creams, tablets and rings that you insert vaginally.

Though ED is more common with age, it isn't an inevitable part of growing older. Rather, it's often due to underlying medical or emotional problems such as heart disease or diabetes, anxiety, or medication side effects. Because ED may be the first sign of an underlying medical condition, it's particularly important to talk to your healthcare provider if you experience this problem. Medications for ED – which aren't recommended for people with certain heart and other health problems or those taking blood-thinning and other drugs – aren't the only option. Others include hormone replacement therapy (for men with low testosterone levels), implants, surgery, hormone-like medications, and counseling.

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DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. May 2012