

Sexual Health

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Healthy Lifestyles

Sexual health is an important part of physical and mental health, as well as your emotional and social wellbeing. It's important to know how to look after your sexual health and to be able to talk about sexual health and relationships with partners.

Women and Contraception

If you do not want a pregnancy, you need to use contraception.

There are 15 different methods of contraception. You can discuss with your GP or at the Sexual health clinic which would be most suitable for you. These include long acting reversible methods (LARCs) that don't depend on you remembering to take them or use them to work. Visit **NHS Choices**, 'contraception guide' for more information.

If you have had unprotected sex and you don't want to get pregnant, you can take emergency contraception. They can be effective for up to five days after unprotected sex to prevent unwanted pregnancy. **Remember:** Emergency contraception should not be used on a regular basis.

Local Sexual Health Services

In Herefordshire there are a range of services to support your sexual health needs:

GP Practices - GPs can provide various contraceptive services and a range of STI screening.

Sex is supposed to be pleasurable. Looking after your sexual health can make your sex life and relationships more fulfilling and enjoyable.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

If you would like more information on the different ways you can adopt a healthier lifestyle, look out for our other leaflets:

- Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating/ Healthy Weight
- Quitting Smoking
- Drinking Alcohol Sensibly
- Mental Wellbeing
- Dental Health

You can find copies of all our leaflets, along with more information on healthy lifestyles at:
www.herefordshire.gov.uk/health-improvement

If you need to get online, our county's libraries offer free computer and internet access at most sites.

For more local information about staying healthy visit:
www.wisherefordshire.org

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Sexual Health



Under 19?
Get a c-card to access
free condoms from
participating
outlets

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

An STI is an infection that can be transferred from one person to another through sexual contact.

This could be from vaginal, anal or oral sex or sharing sex toys. Some, but not all, STIs, can be passed through skin to skin contact and kissing.

Using a condom correctly and consistently can protect against STIs. Some STIs have no symptoms, so you could have an STI without knowing. This is why it is important to get tested regularly, if you are sexually active.

Most STIs can be treated easily and partners can be contacted confidentially to prevent further spread of infection.

Untreated STIs can affect your future fertility and cause other health issues.

If you are having a baby visit NHS Choices to find out more about STIs in pregnancy.

Prefer to test
from home?
Visit SH:24.org

Testing is available from your GP, from the integrated sexual health clinic at 29-30 Commercial Road, Hereford or online at SH:24.org

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

However you define your own sexuality; women who have sex with women and men who have sex with men; you need to consider your sexual health and wellbeing.

Visit **NHS Choices** for further information. Searches are available for 'gay health' and 'transgender health'.

Safer sex

Using a condom can protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as preventing unplanned pregnancy.

Everyone who has had a recent change of partner should get tested for STIs.

Top tips

- **Talk about sex** - Talk to your partner; find out how you both feel about sex, whether you are both ready and what you both feel comfortable in doing.
- **Find out about services** - Make sure that you and your partner know what sexual health services are available and how you can access them.
- **Confused about contraception?** Talk to your GP or sexual health clinic to find out more about your options.
- **Store condoms properly** - Make sure they are in date, not left where they could get damaged and not stored in bright light or warm locations.
- **Practice safer sex!** Condoms are the only form of contraception which help prevent pregnancy AND sexually transmitted infections, if used correctly.
- **Condoms aren't just for vaginal sex** - Use condoms correctly to help protect against STIs every time you have oral, anal and vaginal sex.
- **Use water based lubricant** - Don't use saliva or oil-based lubricants such as massage oil, hand lotion, baby oil or Vaseline as they will damage the condom and make it more likely to split.
- **Something went wrong** - Don't be embarrassed to ask for emergency contraception after unprotected sex. Ask a pharmacist, your GP or sexual health clinic about your options.

Under 19's can get free condoms with a c-card. To join the scheme visit the Sexual Health clinic.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, and weakens your ability to fight infections.

You can only become infected with HIV by having unsafe sex with someone who has the infection. It can also be passed on by sharing infected needles or other injecting equipment or from an HIV positive mother to her child.

HIV is a long term, but manageable condition. There are highly effective treatments available. People who have HIV can expect to live as long as anyone else, if it is detected early and treatment is started. Regular testing is therefore very important.

HIV testing is free, confidential and available from GP's, the sexual health clinic and online at SH:24.org