

Getting the scoop from relationship and sex experts

By Rolyne Joseph | Feb. 10th, 2013

Protected sex is the most effective way for people to have safer and healthier intercourse with their partners.



“It is...important to take care of your and your partner’s sexual health,”
Hirschmann and Harel said. EZRA MARGONO/THE STATESMAN

According to Planned Parenthood, this includes using condoms or having foreplay without intercourse. The organization encourages these practices because safer sex can prevent sexual transmitted diseases (STDs), pregnancy and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Celeste Hirschman and Danielle Harel, sex and relationship therapists based in San Francisco, insist partners share their desires and experiences before having sex.

From their website celesteanddanielle.com and by appointment, they encourage couples to use condoms during sexual intercourse, oral sex and other sexual encounters because condoms are the best method for reducing the risk of STDs and preventing unwanted pregnancy.

For people who are allergic to latex condoms, another option is to use polyurethane condoms, according to the Coalition for Positive Sexuality's website.

People who are in monogamous relationships who choose not to use condoms should be tested to make sure they're healthy, Hirschman and Harel said.

And if a person has STDs or any other bacterial infections, he or she should inform their partner.

Hirschman and Harel also suggested that individuals get tested before having sex, because they have the ability to make sex safer for their partner.

They recommend that women consider non-hormonal forms of birth control such as the modern intrauterine device (IUD), a birth control that can lower a woman's chance of getting pregnant.

In the question and answer that follows, Hirschman and Harel teamed up to share their expertise.

Q: What advice would you recommend for someone who is sexually active?

A: Sex can be a wonderful part of an intimate relationship, and it is important to share your sexual desires and preferences with your partner or partners so you can have the most satisfying sexual experiences possible. In addition to being clear about your needs and desires around sex, it is also important to take care of your and your partner's sexual health.

Q: How can a person protect themselves and their partner?

"You can get sexually transmitted infections from all different kinds of sexual activity," Hirschman and Harel said. EZRA MARGONO/THE STATESMAN

A: The most effective protection against sexually transmitted infections is a condom. Condoms should be used every time you have intercourse in order to make sure you are fully protected. It is also possible to get a sexually transmitted infection through oral sex, so you may want to use a condom for oral sex as well.



There are many forms of birth control to choose from and we suggest you use the type of birth control that you feel you will most be able to stick with.

Q: What are the best ways to practice safer sex?

A: It is helpful to have the lights on when you are putting on a condom and to make sure you read the instructions before putting a condom on. Make sure you squeeze the reservoir tip between your fingers to make sure there is no air trapped in it and keep it squeezed as you roll down the condom all the way to the base of the penis.

Q: How can people lower their risk of getting sexual transmitted infections?

A: Used properly, condoms are extremely effective in minimizing the transmission of STIs, especially HIV.

Q: If the person is not having sex, should the person be concerned with sexual transmitted infections?

A: You can get sexually transmitted infections from all different kinds of sexual activity, including intercourse, oral sex and anal sex. Women are more at risk for sexually transmitted infection from penis – vagina sex than men because the vagina has more mucous membranes. Anal sex without a condom is a high risk activity because the tissues in the anus are very delicate and can split creating a greater likelihood of transmission.

Q: How does safer sex prevents STIs, pregnancy and HIV?

A: HIV and some other STIs are transmitted by bodily fluids—blood, semen, and vaginal secretions and also breast milk though that is pertinent for mother/child transmission more than sexual transmission. Other STIs, such as herpes, are transmitted by coming into contact with active sores or infected skin.

Condoms create a barrier between your body and the bodily fluids, sores and skin of another person so that bacteria and viruses are less likely to be transmitted.

Q: Why should a person avoid a combination of alcohol and sex?

A: If you drink, you lower your inhibitions and you may make decisions to have sex with people you do not want to have sex with or partake in sexual activities that you do not want. People are also more likely to get sexually assaulted if they are highly intoxicated. Additionally, you may be less likely to use a condom or to use a condom properly.

Q: Why should lubrication be used with condoms?

A: Condoms are much less likely to break when additional lubrication is used. Because a condom is different than skin, it can be more drying to the vagina. So additional lubrication decreases friction and limits the likelihood of breakage. Additional lubrication is essential to anal sex because, unlike the vagina the anus is not at all self-lubricating.

Q: Why should young people practice safer sex?

A: Sexually transmitted infections can change your life drastically. If you get an STI, you will need to inform all of your partners and, if it is a virus like HIV or herpes, you will have it for the rest of your life and will have to let future partners know. While many people are now living with HIV and it is not necessarily a death sentence, it generally shortens your lifespan and makes your quality of life much lower.