

It Takes Two: The Condom and the Pill

Be a responsible lover: it is two fold. It takes two to tango and two to make love or have sex.

Sexuality is a normal part of everyone's life and should be enjoyed and celebrated. Part of our sexuality often involves sexual intercourse, which does require some thought and motivation in order to prevent the possible negative outcomes of sex such as unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Talk about both of these responsibilities with your partner prior to having sex and both of you will more than likely live happier and more fulfilling lives and enhance your sexual life as well.

Too often as health professionals, we have to deal with the mechanics and medical problems related to sex, mainly unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Even with the best of intentions, when alcohol or drugs are involved, inhibitions are lowered and people may put themselves at risk.

The most common and popular methods used by people today are the birth control pill and a latex condom.

The Pill

The Birth Control Pill, otherwise known as "the pill," is an extremely safe and effective method of birth control. It is made of estrogen and progesterone, hormones that women already have in their bodies. By taking the pill everyday, the ovulation process or the release of an egg from a woman's ovary does not occur, thus a woman does not become pregnant. The birth control is 99% effective if taken properly. The majority of women can be prescribed the pill.

The birth control pill does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, so a condom is recommended every time a woman has sexual intercourse.

Important points about the pill:

- Take the pill at the same time everyday, being late for a pill or missing a pill can cause the egg to escape from ovary and if condoms are not used, an unplanned pregnancy can result

- During the first month of taking the pill, it is important to use a back up form of birth control to help prevent pregnancy. Latex condoms and spermicidal foam are recommended.

- Try not to miss any pills. If you do miss a pill, take it right away and use a back up form of birth control such as condoms and foam or abstinence for the next 7 days.

- If you miss two pills, take two pills right away and then two the next day and then go back to one pill daily. Follow the 7 day rule and definitely use a back up form of birth control such as condoms and foam or abstinence for the next 7 days. If you miss three pills, call your health care provider.

- Certain medications, including antibiotics, may interact with the pill and cause it not to work. If you are prescribed any medications, check with the clinic or your doctor, or pharmacist as to its effect on the pill.

- Normal nuisance side-effects which may occur when a woman first starts taking the pill are: slight nausea, bloating, breast tenderness and spotting during your cycle. These should go away in the first month or by the time you have been on the pill for three months. If you vomit or have diarrhea while on the pill, it may not be

absorbed into your system and may not prevent pregnancy. So you should use condoms and spermicidal foam or abstinence for the rest of the package.

- Smoking and the pill aren't a great combination smokers are at greater risk of blood clots and heart disease especially if they continue to smoke after the age 35.

The pill is a medication which can only be prescribed by a doctor. It is important so see a doctor once a year for a Pap test, blood pressure and a renewal of your prescription.

Most women have periods which are lighter and shorter and have fewer cramps when on the pill. It also protects against ovarian and endometrial cancer.

Condoms

Latex condoms are extremely effective but must be used each and every time from start to finish.

Directions:

1. Open the package carefully. For extra sensation, add water-based lubricant inside the reservoir tip.
2. Place the condom on the tip of the penis.
3. Squeeze the air out of tip and unroll to the base of the penis, add any water-based lubricant to the outside of the condom, if needed.
4. Check during intercourse to make sure the condom isn't slipping.
5. After ejaculation, hold the condom firmly

by the rim at the base. Withdraw while the penis is still erect.

6. Remove the condom by rolling it off. Do this well away from your partner's body.

7. Discard your condom in the garbage, do not reuse and do not flush down the toilet.

If the condom breaks and possible pregnancy may be a concern, there is help available. Post-coital emergency contraception, otherwise known as the "Morning After Pill," can be taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse to reduce the risk of possible pregnancy. Emergency contraception is prescribed by a physician and is available at the Sexual Health Centre, the Student Health Centre, the After Hours Clinic or from any family physician.

There are other methods of birth control available, so contact your Health Care provider if you are interested in other methods.

You and your partner have an equal responsibility for your sexuality. It is important that you make informed choices about contraception and protection from sexually transmitted infections. Remember, it takes two: the condom and the pill.

Submitted by Marg Milburn and Diane Degarie, Public Health Nurses at the Sexual Health Centre. Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 8:15-4:30, Thursday 9:45-6:00.



Testing 1,2,3 - Getting an HIV test

DENNIS GERMAN

THE BRUNSWICKIAN

So you want to get an HIV test. Well it's really not as hard as you may think it is. You give a couple of vials of blood and in return you receive peace of mind. It's a small price to pay, if you think about it.

First of all, let your physician know that you want to or you are going to be tested. After that there are one of two roads you can follow: 1) your physician will give you a slip of paper that states that you are requesting a HIV test and then it's up to you to make an appointment at your friendly neighbourhood hospital, or 2) you make a call to the Reproductive Health Clinic and tell whomever you are speaking to that you would like to have a HIV test done. The woman (it's usually a woman for some reason) will then set up an appointment for you to have your test done. It is suggested that you wait a period of three months after your last "risky" sexual contact. Risky as defined by the Canadian Health Association is any

exchange of blood or semen. This includes unprotected anal/vaginal intercourse or the sharing of needles. A three month waiting period is suggested (according to some experts six months may be necessary) because the

Eliza Screen test will not detect the HIV virus within the first three months after contracting it. The test does not require you to fast, or to remove any metal objects before entering the doors. Nor does it include any

big, shiny, sharp metallic objects. If you can stand the pain of receiving a needle than you can do this with no problem.

When the time comes for you to get your test done you will proceed to the destination of your choice (as mentioned above). There you will be greeted by person who will probably be in a pleasant mood (although this is not a prerequisite for a government position). Just tell them that you have an appointment at such and such a time and then

sit down and wait your turn. It's not a crowded area because the staff there realizes anonymity is a must for some people. When your turn comes up you will be escorted to a room where you will be greeted by the tester. The tester is usually also a woman for some reason. Anyway she will start into a lengthy talk about HIV and AIDS. She'll tell you how you can and can't contract the virus. You'll fill out a form and then wait to get pricked (pardon the pun). The tester will take two vials of blood from you. Your blood is then sent away to a monastery of vampires, well, actually it's not. Your blood is sent away to be tested. Your name is now not associated with the tested blood. You become a number. The results

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come back in about one to two weeks. The waiting period is nerve wracking. "I know I don't have it, but what about that night with so and so," this is just one of the thoughts that will pass through your head during the next two weeks. Your head will start to fill with doubts and you'll start to remember all the stupid and unsafe things that you've done. After a week or two of driving yourself bananas you'll get a phone call telling you that your results are back.



Now if whoever calls can't get a hold of you in person they will leave a message with someone or on the answering machine. Whatever one it is don't worry the message is very ambiguous. They won't say something like, "Please tell Bob that his HIV test results are back in and they're positive." They'll just say, "Hi Bob it's Mary Magdalene calling, please call me at ???-????." Whatever the results are you'll get another consultation when you go in. If the results are negative, congratulations. If the results are positive, the tester will let you know what services there are for

people with HIV, like counseling groups for example. If you're positive, I know it sounds silly but don't panic. I personally know someone who has lived with the HIV virus for sixteen years and they're as fit as a fiddle. These are scary times kiddies, so don't take anything for granted. AIDS does not have a face. It could be you, it could be me, it could be anyone. So next time you jump into the sack with someone, be safe. After all, is an hour or two really worth a lifetime?

