

Sexual Health Veteran Factsheet

Sexual health is an important part of your overall health and well-being. Being sexually healthy means being able to enjoy a satisfying sexual life, positive relationships, and peace of mind. It also includes taking care of yourself and your partners throughout your life. Being free to talk about sexual health with your partners and health care providers is important.

VA providers regularly ask all patients about their sexual health history to help Veterans achieve their sexual health goals. VA offers a range of preventative sexual health services that include screenings to detect and treat any problems early, and resources to help you make healthy decisions.

How do I know if I'm at risk?

After discussing your sexual history and practices, your provider may recommend testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, viral hepatitis and HPV, even if you don't have any symptoms. All adults should get tested for HIV at least once, and more regularly if you are at risk. In addition to testing, your provider will teach you the best ways to protect you and your partner from getting an STI, including HIV. Think about your sexual relationships and experiences:

- Have you had unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)?
- Do you have multiple sex partners?
- Do you have anonymous sex partners or partners you don't know?
- Do you have sex while drunk or high, which can lower inhibitions and result in greater sexual risk-taking?
- Have you recently had a sexually transmitted infection like gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis?
- Do you exchange sex for money, drugs, food, or a place to stay?
- Do you have a partner who would answer "yes" to any of the above questions?

Talk to your provider about STI testing and prevention if any of these is true for you.

What can I do to prevent STIs?

If you are sexually active, you can lower your chances of getting STIs, including HIV, by:

- Getting tested for STIs regularly and ask your partner(s) whether they have been tested.
- Using a new lubricated condom, consistently and correctly, for every act of vaginal, anal, and oral sex throughout the entire sex act (from start to finish).
- Reducing the number of people with whom you have sex.
- Limiting or stopping drug and alcohol use before and during sex.
- Talking to your health care provider to find out if either pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), is a good option for you to prevent HIV infection.
- Getting vaccinated against HPV, hepatitis A, and hepatitis B, if it is recommended by your health care provider.

Intimate Partner Violence

Many Veterans and their partners are affected by concerns about their intimate relationships. The Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program helps Veterans and their families who are impacted by physical, emotional, and sexual violence regardless of whether it has happened once or many times. Learn more:

www.socialwork.va.gov/IPV/

Resources:

www.HIV.va.gov

www.hepatitis.va.gov

www.cdc.gov/std/default.htm

www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/



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