

**THE SEXPERTS**



**ABOUT SEX  
FOR TRANSGENDER  
PEOPLE**

## ***SEX AND HEALTH***

Our sexuality opens the door to a whole range of fantastic experiences. We can have sex for all kinds of reasons: closeness, desire, lust, love, passion, tenderness, excitement and curiosity.

A good way to find out what you like is to have sex with yourself—to experiment on your own and discover what you enjoy. When you are with others, you can then show your partner(s) what you want and explore all the wonderful experiences that are open to you through sex.



Our society is distinguished by strong norms and expectations which state that you are born either a boy or a girl, and that you then grow up to be a man or a woman. On account of these norms, some people suffer from low self-esteem and depression. They sometimes turn to drugs or alcohol to deal with these difficult feelings. Although this approach can temporarily deaden feelings of discomfort and low spirits, it is not a viable long-term solution for starting to feel better and more at ease.

Good health is not just a matter of being free from illness; it has just as much to do with feeling good about yourself. Some ways to start to feel better include surrounding yourself with decent people, making contact with other people who have—or have had—similar experiences, and seeking professional support.

## ***SEX AND TRANS***

As a transgender person, you are free to choose your sexual identity and have all kinds of sex. However, it is important that you look after your sexual health and take care of yourself.

Viruses and bacteria do not care about gender identity, sexual preferences or the pronoun you choose to use. They are driven to invade bodies—and through our actions we can make it easy or difficult for them to do so.

This leaflet looks at how sexually transmitted diseases and HIV are transferred, what you need to think about to practice safer sex, and how your sexuality and your body are affected by hormone treatments and surgery.

No matter where you feel comfortable within the trans spectrum, we hope that you will find some useful information here.

## ***HPV VIRUS AND CELL TESTING***

HPV is a virus that can cause a variety of illnesses. For example, it can lead to condyloma—i.e. genital warts—and cell changes that can develop into cervical cancer. HPV is very common and can be transmitted easily through vaginal or anal sex via fingers, tribadism or the use of sex toys. There is no way to protect yourself completely against HPV, but using condoms or femidoms will provide some protection.

In Sweden, the healthcare system offers all people who are legally considered women, over the age of 23 and resident in Sweden cell change testing every three years. Irres-

pective of whether you were born with a vagina, or whether your vagina was surgically created, HPV can be transmitted to you, so you should make every effort to have yourself tested.

If you, as a trans-man, have legally changed your gender to male but have not yet undergone genital surgery, it is a good idea for you to book appointments for cell change testing every three years. At the end of this leaflet you will find a list of tips about appropriate clinics and their contact details.

## ***HIV AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS***

HIV is a viral infection that can be transmitted in a number of ways, including via sex. It is classed as a chronic infection as there is yet no cure for HIV. However, antiretroviral



drugs are available which in most cases succeed in reducing the level of the virus in the body and prevent people who suffer from HIV from developing what we call aids. Modern antiviral treatment suppresses the viral load. With an undetectable viral load, the risk of HIV transmission is zero. Undetectable = untransmittable.

“Sexually transmitted infections” (STI) is the term used for other infections that are transmitted through different kinds of sex. They can be caused by bacteria or by viruses that enter the body. It is usually—but not always—possible to treat or cure infections. If you are worried that you might have contracted a sexually transmitted infection, or if you are suffering any discomfort, go and have yourself tested. It is always better to know for sure and to start treatment than to sit at home and worry.

## ***SAFER SEX & HIV***

“Safer sex” is the term for sex with a low risk of transmitting HIV. There are many kinds of safer sex, such as petting, oral sex—if you refrain from taking sperm in your mouth—and sex with sex toys.

However, if you share sex toys with your partner(s), make sure to use condoms on the toys and, if you take turn using them, replace the condom every time you change over. In addition, make sure to change the condom if you switch between vaginal and anal sex with the same person or with a different person.

## ***CONDOMS/FEMIDOMS***

Condoms provide the best protection against HIV, unwanted pregnancies and

most other sexually transmitted infections during anal/vaginal sex. Condoms are designed for placing on a penis or a dildo. All sorts of condoms are available, in various shapes, sizes and materials. Experiment with them to find the type that suits you best! Where will you be having sex next time? Remember to keep condoms and lubricants close by—perhaps by the side of your bed, in a kitchen drawer, or in your gym bag?

If you have a surgically created penis—such as a neo-penis or a penis created by taking testosterone—it can be difficult to keep a condom in place. In that case, it is best to have your partner use a femidom. A femidom is a form of protection that is inserted into the receptive partner, rather than being placed on the penetrating partner.

Most types of sex will be both safer and more enjoyable if you use a lubricant. Remember to use only water or silicone-based lubricants with condoms or femidoms. If you use other products, there is a risk that the condom/femidom may become brittle and tear.

### ***ROLL IT RIGHT***

When you put on a condom, hold the tip between your fingers and squeeze the air out, so there is no air inside the condom. Unroll the condom down the shaft of the penis, making sure that the condom is completely rolled out. If the condom is longer than the penis, it's no problem if it's a little creased. Some people prefer to put a dab of lubricant on the head of the penis before rolling on the condom.



## ***PREP***

Maybe you only use condoms sometimes, or seldom, or don't use them at all. Maybe you want to lower your risk of getting HIV, but condoms don't always work for you. In that case, PrEP can be something that can help you. Using PrEP means taking a medicine that lowers the risk of getting HIV. PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis. The medicine is named Truvada, but there are also cheaper versions with other names from different companies.

- If you want to use PrEP, you have to be completely sure you do not have the HIV virus.
- PrEP gives a very high level of protection, but not 100%.



- Forgetting a pill = less effective protection. Take your pills every day.
- For those only enjoying anal sex, one can choose daily PrEP or “on-demand”. For others, daily PrEP is a safer option.
- PrEP does not protect against chlamydia, gonorrhoea or syphilis. Condoms are the only thing that lower the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases.
- PrEP can have side effects.
- It is important to get check-ups while taking the medicine. Ask your doctor to check up the current recommendations from “Referensgruppen för antiviral terapi”.

PrEP is an approved medical product in Sweden, and it is part of the high-cost protection system. This means that you never pay more than SEK 2 200 per year for prescription medicine.

### ***SOME TIPS:***

It's easy to forget to take your medicine. Here are some ways to help you remember:

- Set a daily alarm on your mobile phone. Either with the regular alarm clock or a special medicine app.
- Keep your medicine in your bag, or hang a small container on your keyring.
- Keep your medicine in a place where you will see it every day. Maybe next to your toothbrush or coffee maker?

## ***TWO OR MORE IN A RELATIONSHIP?***

There are lots of different kinds of relationships. Two or more people can have a monogamous relationship, or a more open way of looking at sex and love. Some people use condoms while in a relationship, others choose to get tested together for HIV, or STIs, and then make a decision to keep using condoms or not in their relationship.

Sometimes, relationships don't work out the way you planned. Having sex with someone other than your partner/s, or breaking the rules you have agreed on, can mean exposing your partner/s to the risk of getting an STI. Therefore, it is important to agree on rules for what you do in the relationship and outside of it. Having the courage to tell your partner/s if



you have done something you shouldn't have, is a way of showing respect and consideration.

## ***WHEN SHOULD I TELL I'M TRANS?***

There are many transgender people, and people with transsexual backgrounds, who choose not to reveal their background or their identity to their partner(s). The decision about whether to do so or not is, of course, yours alone.

If you do want to tell your partner, it can be difficult to find a good time. Is there any situation or place that is better or worse than others? It can be a good idea to tell your partner when there are other people around, before you are alone together in an intimate situation. Unfortunately, some non-trans people find it difficult to unders-

tand, so there may actually be risks involved in coming out. In most cases you will not have any problems, but it is important to be careful.

Exactly what you should say naturally depends on the situation and with whom you are talking. For example, you could come right out and say: "Just so you know, I wasn't born with a man's/woman's body". If you are non-binary for example you may need to explain that you do not consider yourself to be a man or a woman, how you want your partner to view your body, and how and where you want to be touched to ensure that you have sex that feels good. If you want to avoid the problem of the people you have a relationship or sex with using the wrong pronoun to address you, it can be a good idea to tell them at an early stage.



No matter how you identify yourself, it may be that there are some parts of your body that you think match your gender identity to a greater or lesser extent. You, yourself, can choose how you want to use them and what you want to call them.

## ***HORMONES AND SEX***

There are two different hormones that play a key role in gender-affirming treatment: oestrogen and testosterone. These hormones have a significant effect on your whole body, and hormone treatment can change your experience of sex. Precisely how you experience the changes is entirely personal. Both hormones cause your body to undergo a kind of “second puberty”. Testosterone will make your voice deeper, prevent menstruation and boost muscle mass. In addition, your subcutaneous fat

will be redistributed, your facial hair will grow more strongly, and you will grow more hair on other parts of your body. It is usual for the clitoris to grow, too, and some people experience an increase in their sexual drive.

Oestrogen will cause you to develop more subcutaneous fat and, for example, more shapely hips and buttocks. Oestrogen usually also causes your breasts to develop and reduces body hair. It may also become more difficult for you to achieve erection.

The sense of change is particularly pronounced during the first year of the treatment as your body becomes used to the new hormones, and your sexuality will usually stabilise again after a while. Quite how your body changes—and how quick-

ly—is completely individual, and may differ greatly from one person to another.

## ***POST-OP***

If you have undergone gender-affirming genital surgery, it is important that you give the healing process time. The risk of infection is particularly high in tissue that has not healed completely. The best approach is to talk to your doctor about when you can start to try vaginal/anal sex.

Be careful to start with, and listen to your body. Do not try to push the boundaries of what feels good. Relax and take your time. You will have your new genitals for the rest of your life, so you have all the time in the world to enjoy them.

If you have a surgically created vagina, remember that it is just as sensitive to the transfer of infections as other vaginas. Most neo-vaginas are not naturally lubricated, so it is extra important that you use lubricants for safer and more enjoyable sex. Failure to use a lubricant may result in injury and tearing, which may increase the risk of transfer of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

## **TESTING**

Getting tested regularly for HIV or STIs can make life safer both for you, and the people you have sex with. Testing can reduce your worries and make sure you get quick treatment if you do have an infection. Remember, getting tested regularly, for example, every three, six or twelve months, is important. RFSL offers (within Sweden) a free text message reminding service in English.

Text the word THREE, SIX or TWELVE to 71111 to start the service.

It can take up to eight weeks after exposure until an HIV test can show conclusively if there has been an HIV transmission or not, but HIV can often be found after as little as a few weeks. If you feel worried, go for a test. An early diagnosis is always the best thing for your health.

## **THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TESTING**

- In Sweden, you have the right to testing and treatment for HIV, and most STIs free of charge, including syphilis.
- Before taking the test/s, make sure to tell the nurse or doctor what sort of sex you have had. This is important

because STIs can be present in or on the throat, penis/vagina, and anus.

- When you take an HIV test, you always have the right to be anonymous.
- You can get tested at a health centre (Vårdcentral), or at a clinic for STIs (Sesam). If you are young, you can also go to a youth clinic (Ungdomsmottagning). There are also special clinics for men who have sex with men.



## **WHERE TO GO FOR TESTING IN STOCKHOLM**

### **Venhälsan**

The Venhälsan Clinic was previously primarily intended for homosexual and bisexual men, but today it is open to everyone, no matter of gender or sexual identity. A limitation is that they do not perform gynaecological examinations.

*Tel.* 08-616 25 00

*Address:* Sjukhusbacken 14, at Södersjukhuset

### **RFSL Testing**

Stockholm and Örebro: *testpoint.se*

Göteborg: *checkpointgoteborg.org*

Skåne: *safe6.nu/checkpoint*

**Stockholms skolors ungdomsmottagning (SKUM)** If you are under 23 years old, you can have yourself tested at a youth clinic, where you can also take pregnancy tests and receive advice about contraception. skum is an LGBTQ-certified clinic, which means that the staff is specialized in LGBTQ issues.

*Tel.* 08-508 327 40

*Address:* Observatoriegatan 20

### **Gynekologisk HBT-mottagning**

This clinic at Södersjukhuset has staff knowledgeable in transgender issues. They receive everyone who needs a gynecological examination, regardless of gender identity.

*Tel.* 08-616 11 44

*Address:* Sjukhusbacken 10, at Södersjukhuset



## **MEETING OTHERS AND SEEK SUPPORT**

You can meet others by contacting your local RFSL branch. If you are under 26 years old, there are two different groups at RFSL Stockholm you can join: the Transit support group and the Transit conversation group. The support group is for people in transgender medical care, while the conversation group is open to all young transgender people. RFSL Stockholm also hosts the Trans café, a group for transgender people of all ages.

For an up-to-date diary of events, please visit [rfslstockholm.se](http://rfslstockholm.se), or contact us via our Facebook page [facebook.com/rfsl.stockholm](https://facebook.com/rfsl.stockholm).

If you would like to seek professional support, you can contact counsellors with knowledge about trans health. One we recommend is Eva Hansson, please contact her on [hbt-mottagningen@evahansson.com](mailto:hbt-mottagningen@evahansson.com) or call +46 (0)73-818 56 55

## **FIND OUT MORE!**

### **Sexual health in English**

[en.sexperterna.org](http://en.sexperterna.org)

### **Health for trans who sell sex**

[rodaparaplyet.org/en](http://rodaparaplyet.org/en)

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## **THE SEXPERTS**

***The Sexperts are ready to answer all your questions about sex and sex-related issues, in Swedish or English. You can find us at Qruiser, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail us at [sexperterna@rfsl.se](mailto:sexperterna@rfsl.se).***