

## Sexual health

Looking after your sexual and reproductive health is important. It is much more than avoiding unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It's about feeling positive about your body, being able to feel sexy or intimate, whether or not you have a sexual partner or are in an intimate relationship.

Having an enjoyable sex life is easier if you are not worrying about an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

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### Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites that are passed during sexual contact. They include: chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhoea, genital warts, syphilis, HIV and pubic lice. Anyone who is having any type of sexual contact with someone else can be at risk of STIs. You don't need to have had penetrative sex to catch one. They can be passed on through:

- unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex
- sharing sex toys that aren't washed or covered with a new condom each time they're used
- your genitals coming into contact with your partner's genitals
- some STIs are passed on through skin to skin contact

**Many STIs don't have any symptoms**, and you can't tell from looking at someone whether or not they have one. The only way to find out if you have an STI is to get tested. It's free to get tested for STIs.

**Sexual Health Services Newcastle at New Croft Centre** can send you a free STI test kit to you at home so you can test yourself. Or you can make an appointment to visit them to be tested. Staff won't judge you. They can test you for the full range of STIs including chlamydia, HIV, herpes and gonorrhoea. All you need to do to be tested is to pee in a pot or have a swab taken. Some tests might need a small blood sample to be taken.

The service is completely confidential. They they won't tell anyone you have been there, unless they are acting to prevent abuse or to protect someone from risk of harm.

Find out more about sexually transmitted infections on the [NHS website](#).

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### Sexual health services in Newcastle in Newcastle

[Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle at New Croft Centre](#) provides free sexual health support. This includes: contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can [request a free STI home testing kit online](#). They have a range of specialist clinics and face-to-face appointments available. Please phone to arrange a time to attend. They can help you with:

- Pregnancy advice
- Contraception, coil fitting
- Emergency contraception
- Sexual assault support
- Emergency Walk in Clinic available: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.
- HIV testing or treatment if you have been exposed to HIV (PrEP and PEP)
- Chems support
- Young People's clinic supported by [Streetwise](#)
- LGBTQ+ clinic

[Changing Lives](#) supports people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, addictions or long-term unemployment. They provide specialist women's, family services and sexual health services.

[Streetwise](#) provides sexual health support to young people. They offer information, advice, contraception, STI testing and emotional and mental health support.

[YMCA Newcastle](#) youth workers offer confidential support, information and advice to young people. They can help with a range of issues such as: sexual health.

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## **Sexual health symptoms that need treatment**

Many STIs do not have symptoms. However, if you have any of the following symptoms, get a test straight away.

- painful swelling of penis, testicles or foreskin
- soreness or swelling of the vagina
- pain, burning or increase in your weeing
- irregular bleeding
- pain or tenderness in the lower abdomen (tummy)
- pain or bleeding during sex
- a strong, unpleasant smell from the vagina after sex
- blisters or sores
- black powder in your underwear
- brown eggs on pubic or other body hair
- sky-blue spots or very tiny specks of blood on the skin

If you test positive for any STI, your clinic will encourage you to talk to any current sexual partners and sometimes to your previous partners so they can be tested as well. The clinic will help you find the best way to talk to other people if you need to, and can notify and even contact them for you through 'partner notification' without even mentioning your name.

Some STIs, such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea, can be treated and cured with a short course of antibiotics. Other STIs, such as genital herpes or genital warts, can be managed with treatment of symptoms.

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## HIV

**[HIV is a sexually transmitted infection](#)** that cannot be cured, but someone who is diagnosed as having HIV (being HIV positive) can be treated to manage the condition, allowing them to live with the condition without it affecting their health and suppressing the amount of virus in their body to such a low level that they cannot pass it on.

**[Blue Sky Trust](#)** is a registered charity supporting and connecting men, women and children living with and affected by HIV at every step of their journey in Newcastle and surrounding areas. This includes one to one support, peer mentoring, peer support as well as courses to help people live well with HIV and overcome stigma.

**[Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle at New Croft Centre](#)** provides free and confidential sexual health services. This includes testing for HIV and support. People who test positive are referred to the HIV service within [Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals Trust \(NuTH\)](#).

**[Streetwise](#)** support young people aged 11 to 25 years with free information, advice, counselling, support, community activities and sexual health services.

Read more about the **[Can't pass it on campaign from Terence Higgins Trust](#)**.

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## Other sexual health conditions that need treatment

**Bacterial vaginosis (BV)** is the most common cause of vaginal discharge. It is not an STI but it is more common in women who are sexually active.

**Cystitis** is not an STI but sex can trigger it. It is usually caused by bacteria irritating the bladder lining and a common symptom is pain when you wee.

**Hepatitis** is the medical name for inflammation of the liver. There are different causes of hepatitis, some of which are viruses and can be transmitted through sexual activity.

**Pubic lice** are very small, crab-like creatures which live in the pubic hair.

**Proctitis** is not an STI but STIs can trigger it. Proctitis means soreness and swelling of the rectum, the passage that carries faeces out of the body.

**Thrush** (candidiasis) is an infection that is caused by a yeast; it's not sexually transmitted, but it can sometimes appear after you've had sex.

**Trichomoniasis** (also known as Trichomonas, or TV) is caused by a tiny parasite infecting the vagina in women and the urethra in both men and women.

**Urethritis** is not an STI but sex and STIs can trigger it. Urethritis means inflammation of the urethra, the tube that carries urine out of the body from the bladder.

**Vaginitis** is not an STI but sex and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can trigger it. Vaginitis means soreness and swelling of the vagina.

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## Contraception

If you're having penetrative penis in vagina sex and want to prevent pregnancy, there are 15 different methods of **contraception** to choose from. They're available free from your GP or sexual health clinic.

Contraception needs to be used until the menopause. This is two years after last having a period if you're aged under 50, or one year if aged over 50. This advice may be different if you're using hormonal contraception.

The only method of contraception that also protects you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is a **condom**. Find out more about all the methods at [NHS.UK](https://www.nhs.uk)

Contraception is free for everyone and all ages. This include asylum seekers, refugees, if you are not normally resident in the UK or have no fixed address.

[Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle at New Croft Centre](#) provides sexual health support. This includes: free contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can [request a free home testing kit online](#) or book a face to face appointment for help with:

- contraception, condoms or coil fitting
- emergency contraception
- sexual assault support
- HIV testing or treatment if you have been exposed to HIV (PrEP and PEP)
- Chems support
- young people's clinic with [Streetwise](#)
- relationships
- pregnancy advice

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## Condoms

Condoms are a barrier method of protection that reduce the risk of someone with an STI passing it to a sexual partner during sexual contact. They are about 98% effective at preventing infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea. They are less effective at preventing some STIs such as, genital herpes and genital warts which can be passed on through skin-to-skin contact.

They are available as either:

- **external or male condom** they are: put on a penis or sex toy to cover it during sexual contact, usually made from latex but are also available in other materials for those with latex allergy
- **internal or female condom** (sometimes called a Femidom) these are inserted into the vagina or anus and line it loosely and are made from polyurethane (soft plastic) or nitrile polymer (synthetic rubber)

It's important to make sure you know how to use condoms them correctly. They both should be used only once and then disposed of in a bin, not down the loo. Water based lubricant can be used on top of the condom to give extra slipperiness and make penetrative sex more comfortable and enjoyable. It's important to use a condom that is the right size for you, as if it is too large or loose, it can slip off. Vegan condoms are also available from some sexual health clinics (some vegans prefer to avoid some types of latex condoms that are processed using the milk protein, casein).

**A dental dam** (sometimes called a dam) is a soft latex or polyurethane square, about 15cm in size, which is used to cover the vulva or anus during oral sex or 'rimming', which is stimulation of the anus and area around it with the mouth and tongue. The dam acts as a barrier to prevent sexually transmitted infections being passed between partners.

Contraception is free for everyone and all ages at the [New Croft Sexual Health Service](#). This include asylum seekers, refugees, if you are not normally resident in the UK or have no fixed address.

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## Emergency contraception

If you have had unprotected penis in vagina sex or think your usual contraceptive method has failed, emergency contraception can be used up to 5 days after unprotected sex. The sooner you access it, the more chance it has of being effective to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. There are 2 types of emergency hormonal contraception (pill):

- [EllaOne](#) which can be taken up to 5 days after unprotected sex
- [Levonorgestrel](#) (sometimes called Levonelle), which can be taken up to 73 hours (3 days) after unprotected sex

The emergency contraception pill is available for free in most community pharmacies in Newcastle under the 'Plan B' scheme. Make sure you ask for the Plan B trained pharmacist, otherwise you might need to pay. It is also available for free from the New Croft Centre, other sexual health services and most [walk-in and urgent care centres](#).

An IUD or copper coil can be inserted up to 5 days after unprotected sex. This is the most reliable form of emergency contraception and can be fitted at the [New Croft Centre](#) and some GP surgeries.

The only method of contraception that also protects you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is a **condom**.

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## Knowing your own body

It is important to know the sexual anatomy of your own body, understand sex and sexual health terms and recognise symptoms that are unusual. If you are uncertain, then you can look up information on [Brook](#) or visit the [Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle at New Croft Centre](#) or [Streetwise](#) for information and advice.

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## Sex

There are a number of words and phrases that are used to refer to genitals and the parts of the body that people enjoy using during sexual activity. It's useful to know the correct terms for the different parts of your body, even if you don't use those words in everyday life. Usually, people will have either a vulva, clitoris and vagina or a penis and testicles. The anus is the opening in your bottom and the perineum is the sensitive skin between the anus and the genitals.

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## Consent

Consent means agreeing to do something. Sexual consent means you agree to have sex or take part in sexual activity. Consent is essential in any sexual contact, from touching and kissing, to oral, anal and vaginal penetration with a penis or other objects.

By law you can consent to sex or sexual activity at the age of 16. The law applies to all genders and sexualities in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Rape Crisis England & Wales explain [sexual violence](#) and [consent](#).

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## Sexual assault or rape

If someone forces you to do something you do not want to do of a sexual nature, it is never your fault and it is not okay. If this has happened to you, you should report it or speak to someone you trust to get help and support. Any sort of sexual activity without consent is illegal whatever the age of the people involved and whatever your relationship.

Sexual violence can happen at any point in a person's life and violent sexual behaviour is similar across the age range. This includes rape, molestation, sexual threats, harassment and forced exposure to pornography. Sexual violence against adults and children often occurs in their homes and other places in the community, as well as in institutional settings, such as long term care facilities. There are misconceptions regarding rape, including the myth that sexual violence is a crime of passion rather than an act of violence and also that rape only happens to younger people.

[Rape Crisis Tyneside & Northumberland](#) support women and girls of any age who have experienced sexual violence.

[The Angel Centre Sexual Assault Referral Centre \(SARC\)](#) offer free, confidential healthcare and compassionate support to people aged 16 years or older in Northumbria that have experienced sexual assault, including rape, in their lifetime. You can call their helpline 24 hours a day, every day of the year. To speak with a nurse for support and to discuss your options for making an in-person appointment. They can offer support and care for recent and non recent cases. Please note this is not an emergency service.

If you are unable to give consent or you feel pressured, scared or you're drunk or high and a person still has sex or a sexual activity with you, this is a sexual assault or rape.

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# Family and Sexual Health

## Puberty

Children learn about sexual health from Year 5 and 6 in primary school throughout secondary school. This is to prepare them for puberty and changes in their bodies and inform them about sexually healthy behaviour. [Brook](#) has a section on puberty as well as anatomical diagrams. Sessions also explain that from a young age, we start to think about love, romance, and sex and we will meet a variety of people who we may be compatible with as friends or partners.

[Streetwise](#) provides sexual health support to young people. They offer information, advice, contraception, STI testing and emotional and mental health support.

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## Pregnancy

You can get pregnant as a result of having vaginal sex without using contraception or if your usual method of contraception fails. See the section on emergency contraception.

To become pregnant, an egg must be released from your ovaries and then fertilised by sperm. Every month you release an egg (sometimes two) around 14 days after the first day of your period, or 10-16 days before the start of your next period. The egg travels down the fallopian tubes, which connect the ovaries to the womb. Once released, the egg lives for around 24 hours. This process is called ovulation.

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## Menstruation

Girls will experience [menstruation](#) or periods somewhere between the ages of 8 and 17 years. A menstrual cycle starts on the day that you get your period and lasts until the day before you get your next one. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days, but it can be a bit longer or shorter for some people. Every month, your womb or uterus (which is the space where a foetus /baby develops) builds up its lining in order to prepare for getting pregnant. This lining, mostly made up of blood, is what is shed when your period starts. This is why your periods stop when you become pregnant – the womb lining is used to provide nutrients to the growing fetus, instead. Brook has a section on menstruation.

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## Menopause

[Menopause](#) means the stopping of periods. Someone is defined as having reached menopause one year after having their last period.

The average age for menopause is 52, but it can happen much earlier. This is called premature menopause.

Often, symptoms can start a long time before menopause, usually in the mid to late 40s. This is called perimenopause. Your fertility (ability to have children) will fade away and stop. At the same time, your periods will become irregular, then stop. You may like to speak to your GP about symptoms and treatment if it is causing you problems.

Some men experience erectile dysfunction. This may be related to stress, alcohol and drugs, illness or tiredness. These symptoms may be temporary. If you are worried, you can get help at the [New Croft Centre](#).

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## Sex and Disability

Not all health conditions or disabilities affect sexual function, but impaired movement, hearing or sight may make expression more difficult. Intimacy with a partner does not have to include sex, but sex may be a significant part of your emotional life. There are many people who look for help, someone to talk to and they may like to find a safe dating space.

[The Outsiders Trust](#) is a social, peer support run by and for socially and physically disabled people. Our members have a wide range of impairments, including visual and hearing impairment. They run a sex and disability helpline. They also run the [Outsiders](#) dating club.

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## Relationships

There are many different types of relationships:

- family
- friends and acquaintances
- teachers and colleagues
- romantic or sexual partners

Healthy relationships help you to thrive and provide support when you we feel anxious, scared or vulnerable. Good relationships are based on respect, trust, and communication. That's true whether it's your relationship with your best friend, your teacher or your partner.

### Romantic relationships

Not everyone has romantic relationships. However, some people have more than one romantic relationship during their life. Going out with different people helps you find out who you are compatible with and what you want from a relationship.

See our information on [family and relationships](#) and [sex in later life](#).

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## Training and Support

[Rape Crisis](#) offer training and support courses for staff and volunteers.

[Sexually Healthy Newcastle](#) offer training and support courses for staff and volunteers

[Skills for People](#) offer sexual health training for people with learning disabilities.

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## Useful Organisations

### Sexual Health Services Newcastle

**Email:** stsft.newcastlesexualhealthservices@nhs.net

**Website:** [www.newcastlesexualhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.newcastlesexualhealth.nhs.uk)

**Telephone:** 0191 273 6222

**Address:** Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle, NE4 6AU

### Blue Sky Trust

**Email:** info@blueskytrust.org

**Website:** <https://www.blueskytrust.org>

**Telephone:** 07989 155175

**Address:** The Castlegate, NE1 2JQ

### Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA)

**Email:** contact@slaauk.org

**Website:** [www.slaauk.com](http://www.slaauk.com)

**Telephone:** 07989 155175

**Address:** 214 Westgate Road, NE4 6AN

### Sexwise

**Email:** sexwise@fpa.org.uk

**Website:** <https://www.sexwise.fpa.org.uk/>

**Telephone:** 07989 155175

### Everyturn Children and Young People's Services

**Email:** cypadmin@everyturn.org

**Website:** <https://www.everyturn.org/children-young-people/counselling-for-children-and-young-people/>

**Telephone:** 0191 230 5533

**Address:** Everyturn Children and Young People's Services, NE4 9PQ

## **Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland**

**Email:** enquiries@rctn.org.uk

**Website:** [www.rctn.org.uk](http://www.rctn.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 0191 222 0272

**Address:** PO Box 1320, NE99 5DX

## **Byker Sands Family Centre**

**Email:** childrenfamiliesnewcastle-east@newcastle.gov.uk

**Website:** <https://www.facebook.com/Community-Family-Hub-East-1742672322696105/>

**Telephone:** 0191 275 9636

**Address:** Byker Sands Family Centre, NE6 2FF

## **The Galafield Centre**

**Email:** newcastleouterwestenquiries@newcastle.gov.uk

**Telephone:** 0191 277 7800

**Address:** Galafield Centre, NE5 1LZ

## **Nunsmoor Centre**

**Email:** innerwestcfn@newcastle.gov.uk

**Website:** <https://childrenandfamiliesnewcastle.org.uk/welcome-your-family-hub>

**Telephone:** 0191 277 4400

**Address:** Studley Terrace, NE4 5AH

## **Terence Higgins Trust**

**Website:** <https://www.tht.org.uk/>

**Telephone:** 0808 802 1221

**Address:** 439 Caledonian Road , N7 9BG

## **Suzy Lamplugh Trust**

**Email:** info@suzylamplugh.org

**Website:** <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/>

**Telephone:** 0808 802 1221

**Address:** The Foundry, SE11 5RR

## **Tiny Lives Trust**

**Email:** info@tinylives.org.uk

**Website:** <https://www.tinylives.org.uk/>

**Telephone:** 0191 230 2112

**Address:** 19 Riverside Studios , , NE4 7YL

## **The Angel Centre Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)**

**Email:** Newcastle.sarc@nhs.net

**Telephone:** 0191 230 2112

**Address:** The Angel Centre Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), NE11 0JT

## **Barnardo's Newcastle Young People's Support Team**

**Email:** newcastleypst@barnardos.org.uk

**Website:** <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/newcastle-young-peoples-support-team-independence-project>

**Telephone:** 0191 253 2127

**Address:** Pottery Bank Community Centre,, NE6 3SW

## **Barnardo's Orchard Mosaic**

**Website:** <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/orchard-mosaic-trauma-informed-therapeutic-services>

**Telephone:** 0191 212 0237

**Address:** Barnardo's Orchard Mosaic, NE2 2AN

## **The Outsiders Trust**

**Email:** sexdis@Outsiders.org.uk

**Website:** <https://outsiders.org.uk/>

**Telephone:** 01997 421 019

**Address:** WestEnd, BS48 3RE

## **Outsiders**

**Email:** members@outsiders.org.uk

**Website:** <https://www.outsiders.org.uk/outsidiersclub/>

**Telephone:** 07872 681 982

## **YMCA Newcastle**

**Email:** enquiries@ymcanewcastle.com

**Website:** <https://ymcanewcastle.com/>

**Telephone:** 0191 275 9855

**Address:** YMCA, NE6 3AB

## **Changing Lives**

**Email:** central.office@changing-lives.org.uk

**Website:** <http://www.changing-lives.org.uk>

**Telephone:** 0191 273 8891

**Address:** Unit D13 Marquis Court, NE11 0RU

## **Skills for People**

**Email:** information@skillsforpeople.org.uk

**Website:** [www.skillsforpeople.org.uk](http://www.skillsforpeople.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 0191 281 8737

**Address:** 4 Glendale Terrace, NE6 1PB

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## Related Articles

[Finding a partner](#)

[Family and relationship problems](#)

[Civil Partnership](#)

[Sex in Later Life](#)

[Menstruation](#)

[Support Groups](#)

[Adult abuse](#)

[Domestic abuse](#)