

# HARM REDUCTION WITH LATEX

## Skills to Be Learned

- Identifying the Harm of Unsafe Sexual Practices
- Learning Harm Reduction Techniques (e.g., condom selection and application)

In the previous chapter we talked about the need to always "be prepared" by knowing how to reduce the harm of injection drug use in the event that you have a "slip". However, unlike drug use, sexual activity is not something, presumably, that you are trying to give up. However it is probably a part of your life about which you may have conflicting feelings. On the one hand, sexual intimacy in a caring relationship can greatly enrich your life; on the other hand, unsafe sexual practices can threaten the health and even the life of both yourself and your partner. Therefore, in addition to being prepared for reducing the injection drug use, you also need to be prepared for situations in which you are at risk for engaging in high risk sexual activities. That's what we will be talking about in this chapter. Here's our conscientious friend again, this time very well prepared for any high risk sexual situation he might encounter



This is often the image people have of safer sex—that you need to be protected from head to toe, clean and sterile, as if entering an operating room. It is an amusing image to be sure. However, “being prepared” by knowing how to reduce the harm of sexual activity is very serious and is an important step in your pursuit of a new and healthy lifestyle.

Before we consider ways to reduce harm, let's identify the harm that unsafe sex can cause.

Here are some examples of the harms caused by unsafe sex:

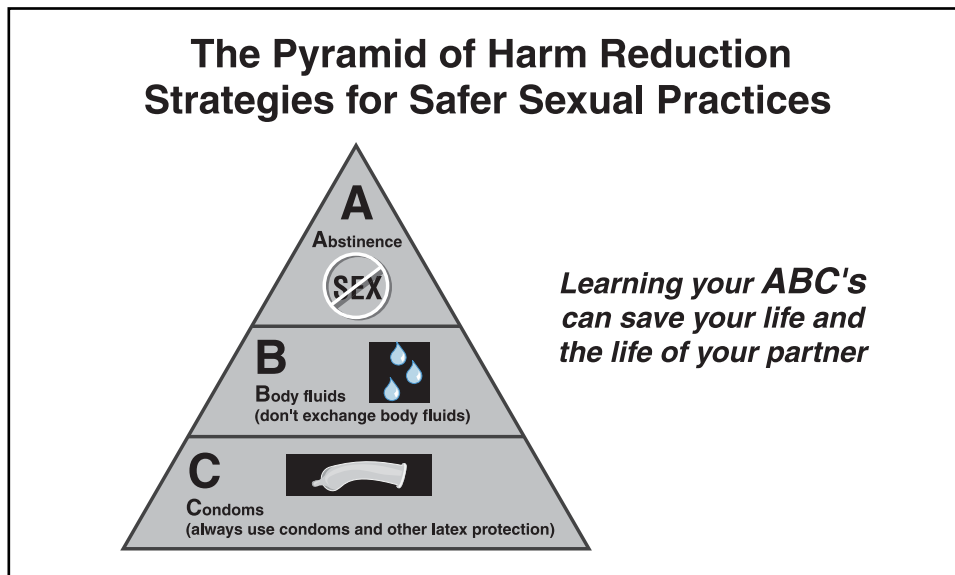
- **Legal Harm** = legal consequences of nondisclosure of HIV status (*note*: varies by State); paternity/child support claims; prostitution-related arrests;

- **Emotional Harm** = fear, anxiety, depression, loss of self-respect;
- **Family/Social Harm** = unwanted pregnancy, transmission of HIV to partner or unborn child;
- **Financial Harm** = expenses of medical care, pregnancy, childcare;
- **Medical Harm** = Transmission of infections (including HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases and blood-borne infections).

Can you think of others?

We know that some people who have tested positive for HIV may continue to engage in unprotected sex. The harm reduction techniques we will be teaching in this chapter will help protect you and your partner from one of the most damaging consequences of unsafe sex -- transmission of infections.

### Harm reduction is as simple as A B C.



#### **A = Abstinence.**

Experts don't always agree on the relative risks of various sexual activities. They do agree, however, that **the only way to completely prevent all harm is to abstain** from sexual activity.

#### **B = Don't exchange Body Fluids.**

Sexual relations contribute substantially to the quality of many people's lives, and you may have chosen not to be celibate. It is important to look at the costs and benefits to you and your partner of being sexually active, and to do whatever you can to reduce the potential harm of sexual intimacy. If you are not going to be celibate, the best way to reduce harm would be to engage only in those sexual practices that **do not involve the exchange of body fluids.**

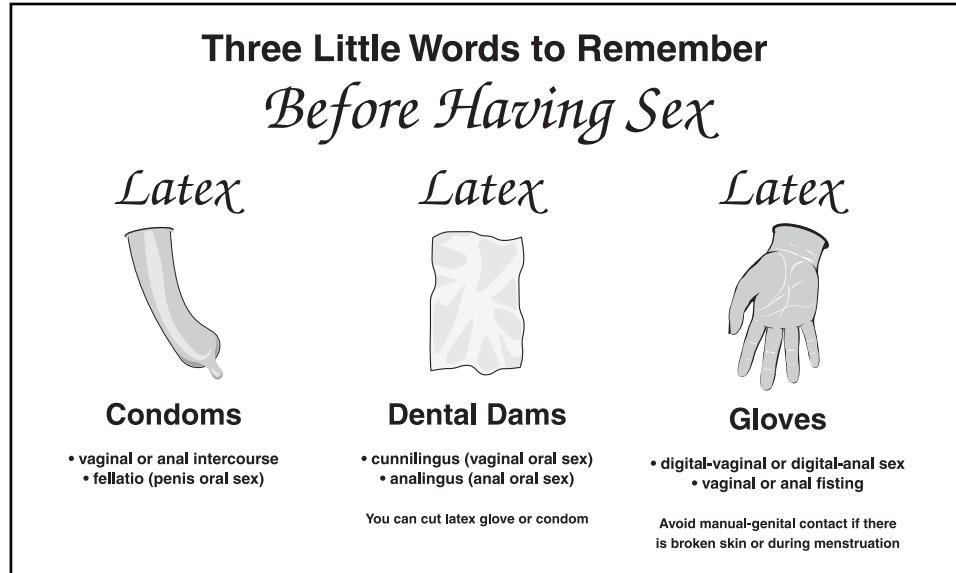
Some examples of ways to be sexually intimate without the exchange of body include:

- Erotic massage
- Bathing together
- Erotic dancing
- Sharing fantasies
- Phone sex
- Using personal (unshared) sex toys
- Mutual masturbation
- Consensual voyeurism
- Watching, reading erotic material

Can you think of other examples?

**C** = Always use **Condoms** and other latex protection

If you are going to engage in sexual activity that does involve the exchange of body fluids, what are the three little words you should always remember? Here's a hint; it's not "I love you."



Instead, **show** your partner how much you care by saying these three little words—latex, latex, latex. The best way to reduce the potential medical harm of sexual intimacy is to **always use condoms and other latex protection.**

Use:

- **Latex** condoms for vaginal and anal intercourse (penis to vagina or penis to anus) and oral sex (mouth to penis)
- **Latex** dental dams for oral sex (mouth to vagina, mouth to anus). If you cannot find or afford dental dams, you can cut up a condom or a latex glove to use as a barrier.
- **Latex** gloves for hand to penis, vagina, or anus, especially if there are any abrasions or broken skin on hands or fingers.

## Frequently asked questions

1. Does a man need to use a condom if he does not ejaculate (come) inside his partner?

**Answer:** Yes.

- a) Even if the male does not ejaculate (come) inside the partner's vagina, mouth, or anus, infection can be transmitted through the pre-ejaculatory fluid that can leak from the penis prior to ejaculation. So it is very important to place a condom on the penis as soon as the male achieves an erection.
- b) Infection can also be transmitted through blood from the vagina or anus. In addition to obvious sources of blood (e.g., a woman's menstrual cycle), there may be hidden sources, such as internal sores or abrasions caused by friction during sexual activity.

2. Are all condoms equally effective in reducing harm?

**Answer:** No. Only latex condoms reduce the risk of HIV infection. Animal skin condoms such as lambskin, can prevent pregnancy, but they do not prevent the transmission of HIV. The pores in these condoms are small enough that they do not allow sperm to pass through, thus preventing pregnancy, but are large enough to allow the HIV virus to pass through.

3. What kind of lubricant should you use with condoms, and why?

**Answer:** Lubricants can increase sensation and pleasure. However, use only water-based lubricant with latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants can damage latex condoms and reduce their effectiveness.

4. What is nonoxynol-9?

**Answer:** Nonoxynol-9 is a spermicide found in lubricants, contraceptive gels, and on many latex products because it was once thought to provide protection against HIV. However, in August 2000, the CDC issued a **warning against the use of nonoxynol-9**. This was based on the results of research showing that nonoxynol-9 was actually **not** effective in preventing HIV and may, under certain circumstances, even **increase the risk** for HIV transmission. We therefore no longer recommend the use of lubricants with nonoxynol-9 or condoms with nonoxynol-9. If a condom with nonoxynol 9 is the only kind of condom available, it is better than not using a condom at all.

5. When should you put on a condom?

**Answer:** Both male and female condoms should be put on/in before any sexual contact. Male condoms should be put on as soon as the penis is erect. Female condoms can be inserted well in advance of any sexual activity.

6. When should you remove the condom?

**Answer:** A man should pull out of vagina/anus/mouth immediately after ejaculating/coming; hold the condom at the base when pulling out to prevent the condom from slipping off, and carefully "milk" the condom off the penis. Tie a knot in the condom to ensure that no semen escapes. A female condom should also be removed as soon as possible, wrapped, and disposed of safely.

7 Why should you worry about using latex if you are already HIV-positive?

**Answer:** Remember the word **C-A-R-E** from the previous chapter.

**C = Compromised immune system.** When you are HIV-positive, your immune system, which helps your body fight infection, has been weakened. Exposure to any other infections is potentially very dangerous, because your body has less ability to fight infection, and as a result can hasten the disease process.

**A = Altruism.** That means having concern for the welfare of others – you don't want to spread HIV and other infections to your partner or unborn children.

**R = Reinfection.** By sharing needles or works or having unsafe sex, individuals with HIV can become re-infected with a strain of HIV that is resistant to some of the newer treatments. Therefore, you may greatly reduce your treatment options, and the treatment options of your partner.

**E = Evidence.** HIV is transmitted sexually by the sharing of body fluids (blood, semen, vaginal secretions, breast milk). Only latex can reduce the sexual-transmission of HIV. You need to use latex protection for vaginal, anal, and oral sex, and for hand-to-genital or anal contact.

8. Do you need to use latex protection even if you are monogamous (have sex with only one person) and your partner is also HIV-positive?

**Answer:** Yes. Although being monogamous is safer than having multiple partners, you and your partner could potentially infect each other with medication-resistant strains of HIV. This is because HIV can mutate (change) so that medication is no longer effective against it. When you engage in unprotected sex or if you share needles or other drug paraphernalia your risk transmitting (or becoming infected) with a strain of the virus that would not respond to medication. You or your partner could also have another infection due to drug use or some other cause that could be transmitted sexually, and that could have serious consequences due to the immune system being weakened by HIV. So, insisting on the use of latex in a monogamous relationship does not imply a lack of trust in your partner's fidelity. You both need to practice harm reduction—even if you are monogamous. Remember, there are very good reasons for an individual who is HIV-positive to C.A.R.E. about latex.

## Review

Let's review what we have covered so far. We've considered the harm caused by unsafe sexual practices, and the difference between harm prevention and harm reduction. We focused on the medical harms of unsafe sex, and discussed the reasons why someone who is already HIV positive should **C-A-R-E** about using latex even if his or her sexual partner is also HIV-positive—**C=compromised immune system; A=altruism; R=reinfection; E=evidence** that latex can reduce the spread of HIV. We went over the **ABCs** of harm reduction: **A=Abstinence**—the only way to prevent or avoid harm is abstinence; the ways to reduce harm are **B=never exchange Body fluids** (including semen, vaginal secretions, blood, or breast milk), and **C = always use Condoms** and other latex protection. The three little words to remember before having sex are—latex, latex, latex. We also discussed the difference between latex and lambskin condoms and oil- and water-based lubricants, and why it is important to always use latex condoms and water-based lubricants. Now, we will go over the important points to remember to reduce the harm of sexual intimacy.

## Key Steps for Safer Sex

1. The only way to completely prevent harm is abstinence.
2. Safer sex = no exchange of bodily fluids.
3. The first step to having safer sex is being sober.
4. Besides not having sex, the best way to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is by always using latex or polyurethane condoms.
5. Condoms that are kept on all the way through sex help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted viruses, including HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other STDs.
6. STDs often cause genital lesions or sores that make it easier for you to get infected with HIV, and hepatitis B and C, and also make it easier for you to infect others if you are already infected.
7. Use only latex or polyurethane condoms. Condoms made of lambskin, sheepskin, and other natural materials do **not** protect you from getting HIV, hepatitis B or C, or other sexually transmitted diseases.
8. Always check expiration date on condom package.
9. Store condoms in a cool, dry place; out of direct sunlight.
10. Use only water-based lubricants; never use oil-based lubricants with latex.
11. Use lubricants inside partner and inside tip of condom for increased sensation.
12. Put on condom before any genital contact.
13. Don't open condom package with teeth; you can tear the condom.
14. Roll condom down over penis to base; don't pull it.
15. Pull out of vagina/anus/mouth right after ejaculating/coming.
16. Tie knot in condom and dispose of it.
17. Never reuse male or female condoms, and never use both at the same time.
18. Female condoms are polyurethane, baglike devices that are placed in the female genital canal to protect it from seminal fluid and blood.
19. Female condoms reduce the risk of acquiring diseases, such as HIV, hepatitis C and B, and other STDs, and of becoming pregnant.
20. For oral sex, use non-lubricated condoms for oral-penis contact, and use dental dams for oral-vaginal and oral-anal contact. If no dental dams are available, a piece of condom or latex glove or nonmicrowavable plastic wrap, such as Saran Wrap© could be used; wash off the talcum powder if using latex).
21. Use latex gloves for hand-to-genital/hand-to-anal contact. Wash talcum off exterior of glove prior to use.
22. Clean lubricant applicators and sex toys after use.
23. Spermicides, such as diaphragm jelly and contraceptive sponges, do **not** kill HIV or hepatitis B or C, so they should never be used instead of condoms.



24. Avoid having sex during a woman's menstrual period.
25. Do not consume breast milk.

### **Practice Exercise: Practice Using Latex.**

You'll need a banana, a latex condom, and water-based lubricant. Using a banana provides an opportunity to practice your skill without any pressure. You might even ask your sexual partner to practice with you. Even if you have used condoms many times, review the steps outlined in the previous section while you practice. Have fun with this practice exercise, and while you practice, remind yourself that what you are doing right now may save lives—your partner's and your own.

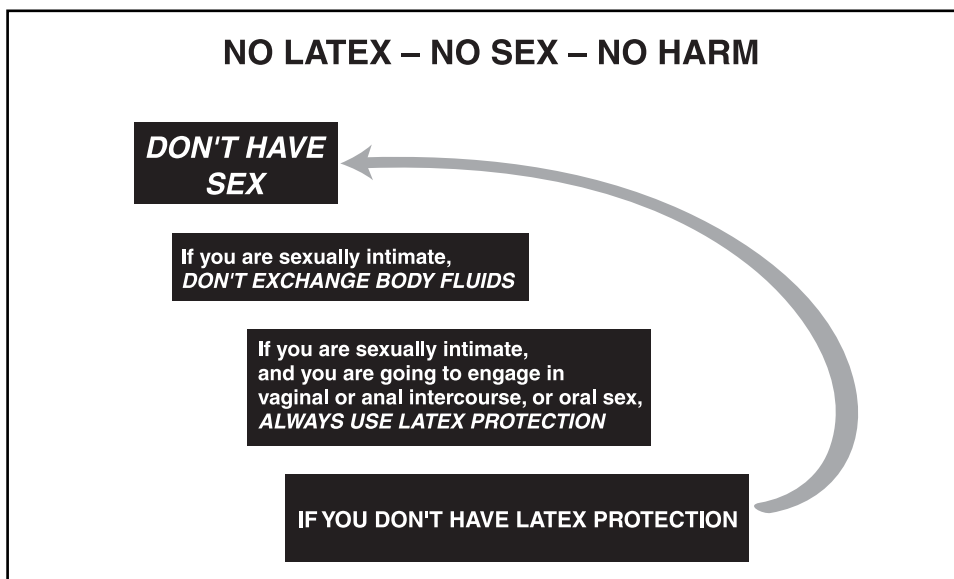
### **Great Lovers Use Latex**

People used to believe that using latex products takes all the fun and spontaneity out of sex. However, you are really only limited by your imagination.

In a sexual relationship latex products can improve:

- Creativity (increase the pleasure of foreplay with creative use of latex)
- Communication (talk to your partner about sexual likes and dislikes)
- Caring (show your partner that you care about his/her health)

So don't think of latex as spoiling your fun, think of latex as a way to make you a better lover—a lover whose motto is "No latex, no sex, no harm".



In the next chapter, we will be discussing how to talk to your partner about using safer sexual practices, how to overcome any objections to using latex, and how to make using latex more fun.

## Quiz

- 1. HIV can be sexually-transmitted by exchanging which of the following body fluids:**
  - a. semen
  - b. vaginal secretions
  - c. blood
  - d. all of the above
  
- 2. An HIV-positive drug user should use a condom even if his or her partner is also HIV-positive.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
- 3. Which of the following is a reason why a person who is HIV-positive should care about practicing safer sex:**
  - a. compromised immune system (increased vulnerability to infection)
  - b. altruism (concern for the welfare of others)
  - c. re-infection with HIV (a strain that may be resistant to medication)
  - d. all of the above
  
- 4. The three little words to remember before having sex are:**
  - a. I love you
  - b. people, places, things
  - c. latex, latex, latex
  - d. location, location, location
  
- 5. Unsafe sexual practices include:**
  - a. using oil-based lubricants with condoms
  - b. using lambskin condoms
  - c. opening condom package with teeth
  - d. all of the above

## **Practice Exercise: Stress Management/Relaxation**

We recommend that you conclude each chapter by doing a ten-minute relaxation exercise. Use this time to practice meditation or deep breathing, or to play an audiotaped relaxation or visualization technique. Dim the lights, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Remember that learning to relax is a skill that takes practice, so if you feel restless at first, just remind yourself that this is a ten-minute gift of quiet time that you give to yourself. With practice, you can use meditation and relaxation in many areas of your life. For example, reducing risk in intimate sexual relationships requires being focused and being able to demonstrate that you care about yourself and your partner. Use your relaxation time to practice maintaining your focus on reducing risk and protecting health, and soon you will be able to remain focused even when you are in the height of passion.

## Using the Male Condom



1. Use a new condom with each act of intercourse and check the expiration date.
2. Carefully open the condom package. (Avoid damaging it with fingernails, teeth, or other sharp objects).
3. Put the condom on as soon as the penis is erect and before any genital contact with the partner.
4. Pinch the reservoir tip to ensure that no air is trapped in the tip of the condom. (This can cause the condom to break).
5. Use only water-based lubricants (e.g., K-Y Jelly or glycerin) with latex condoms (oil-based lubricants {e.g., petroleum jelly, shortening, mineral oil, massage oils, body lotions, or cooking oil} weaken latex and should never be used).
6. Hold the rim of the condom firmly against the base of the penis during withdrawal, and withdraw while the penis is still erect to prevent spillage.
7. When removing the condom, be certain to milk the condom off from the base of penis, to ensure that semen does not spill out. Dispose of condom properly.
8. Avoid further sexual contact with your partner until both of you wash your sex organs and any other areas that came in contact with body fluids.

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**Sources:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5106a1.htm>)  
American Social Health Association ([http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/condom\\_m.html](http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/condom_m.html))  
<http://www.safersex.org>

## Using the Female Condom



The female condom is a sleeve-like device made of polyurethane. It has a small closed end, and a larger open end. Each end contains a flexible ring. Use this simple step-by-step guide to using female condoms to assure that you are using them properly during vaginal and/or rectal intercourse.

### Here's How:

1. The female condom must be properly positioned before any contact occurs between the penis and vagina and/or rectum. The female condom may be used for both vaginal and rectal sexual intercourse.
2. For vaginal use, squeeze the smaller ring and insert it into the vagina. The large end should be placed over the vaginal opening to protect the outer genitalia from infection.
3. For rectal use the small ring should be removed. Place the condom over the erect penis. The condom will be inserted with your partner's penis.
4. Be sure the penis goes directly into the large ring to preclude unprotected sexual contact between the penis and the vagina or rectum.
5. Remove the condom immediately after sexual intercourse and before standing up. To avoid semen leakage the large outer ring should be twisted. Carefully pull the condom out and dispose of it.

### Tips:

1. Take your time and push the female condom up to where you can feel the pubic bone. You will feel the pubic bone by curving your index finger when it is a couple of inches inside the vagina. If the female condom is too slippery to insert, let it go and start over.
2. Make sure the condom is inserted (not twisted) into the vagina.
3. Use care when storing condoms. They should not be kept in places with extreme temperatures either hot or cold. Do not store them in a pocket or billfold.
4. Use a new condom for each act of sexual intercourse. Do not use the same condom for vaginal and rectal sex.
5. Never use a male condom and a female condom at the same time.
6. Always use water-based lubricants with condoms. Oil-based lubricants will destroy latex condoms. Lubricants are not needed when condoms are used for oral sex.
7. Never throw a used condom into your toilet, they can easily clog up your pipes and require expensive plumbing repairs.
8. The female condom can be inserted up to 8 hours before sex. However, most women insert the condom between 2 to 20 minutes before sex. It is for **one-time use**. Use a new female condom with each sex act.

### What You Need:

- Water-based lubricant
- Female condom

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**Sources:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5106a1.htm>)  
The Female Condom Company (<http://www.femalehealth.com/theproduct.html>)  
American Social Health Association ([http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/condom\\_f.html](http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/condom_f.html))  
<http://www.safersex.org>



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