

# Your sexual health

Where to go for help and advice

## CONTENTS

What is this leaflet about?	2
Who can help me with my sexual health?	3
How can I find where my nearest service is?	3
Contraception services	6
Sexually transmitted infection services	9
Planning a pregnancy	13
Unplanned pregnancy	15
Abortion services	17
Sexual problems	19
Sexual assault services	20
About <b>fpa</b> 's confidential helpline	23
How <b>fpa</b> can help you	24

## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet explains where you can get help and advice if:

- you need contraception
- you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection
- you're planning to become pregnant
- you are pregnant and are not sure you want to have a baby
- you want to find out more about abortion
- you're having problems with your sex life
- you have been sexually assaulted.

## Who can help me with my sexual health?

- General practices.
- Specialist contraceptive clinics.
- Sexual health clinics.
- Sexually transmitted infection testing clinics (genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics).
- Pharmacies.
- Specialist sexual assault centres.

Clinics that provide contraception *and* infection testing services are called sexual health clinics.

## How can I find where my nearest service is?

- You can find out about all sexual health services from sexual health direct, run by **fpa**, on 0845 122 8690 or at [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk).
- You can find details of general practices and pharmacies in England at [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) and in Wales at [www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk). In Scotland you can find details of general practices at [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk). In England and Wales you can call **NHS Direct** on 0845 46 47 and in Scotland **NHS 24** on 08454 24 24 24. In Northern Ireland call **fpa**'s helpline on 0845 122 8687 or for details of general practices see [www.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.n-i.nhs.uk).
- You can also get details of your nearest contraception, GUM or sexual health clinic from your local directory, health centre, local pharmacy, hospital, midwife, health visitor or advice centre.

- You can get details of GUM or sexual health clinics from the **Sexual Health Line** on 0800 567 123 or at [www.condomessentialwear.co.uk](http://www.condomessentialwear.co.uk).
- You can find details of young people's services from **Brook** on 0800 0185 023 or from **Sexwise** on 0800 28 29 30, or at [www.ruthinking.co.uk](http://www.ruthinking.co.uk).

## Q Who can use these services?

**A** Anyone can use these services, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, religion, whether you are male, female, straight, gay or bisexual. Some services hold sessions for men, women, young people, gay men and lesbians.

## Q Are these services confidential?

**A** Yes, all the services discussed in this leaflet are confidential. This means that your personal information, any information about your visit and the tests and treatments that you've had will not be shared with anyone outside that service without your permission. Even if you are under 16 you have the same right to confidentiality as anyone else. Don't be afraid to ask if you are not sure who will see your information.

Health professionals may need to involve other services if they believe you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (such as physical or sexual abuse). They will discuss this with you.

## Q What will happen when I go to one of these services?

**A** This will depend on which service you use but may include the following:

- You will normally be asked to fill in a form with your name and address if it's the first time you've used the service.
- At contraceptive services you may be asked questions about your medical and sexual history. If you choose certain methods of contraception you will need to have an internal examination, have your blood pressure taken or may be offered a test for sexually transmitted infections.
- If you are going for a check-up for sexually transmitted infections you will be asked questions about your sex life. You might feel embarrassed but being honest will help you get the right tests. See How will I be tested for STIs? on page 12.
- If you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection support will be available to help you tell your sexual partner(s) to get a check-up too.
- Abortion services will ask you about your medical history and help you decide which method of abortion you will have. They may offer you a test for sexually transmitted infections. If necessary they will do a scan to see how pregnant you are, and a blood test.
- If you have been sexually assaulted you may be offered a more specialist service. They can also help you report the assault to the police, if you choose to.

It's fine to take a friend with you for support. If you need to have an examination you should be offered a chaperone. This means that someone else can be with you when you have the examination.

## Q What if I have special requirements?

A Everyone has a right to access health services. If you have special requirements (such as a disability or if English is not your first language) contact the general practice or clinic in advance to make sure it can meet your needs. In some circumstances you may be able to be seen at home.

## Q How can I make a complaint if I'm not happy with the service?

A If you are not happy with the NHS service you have received you have the right to make a complaint through the NHS complaints procedure (see [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)). You can also get information and help from **The Patients Association Helpline** on 0845 608 4455 or from your local **Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS)**. See your local directory, or ask at the service you attended.

## Contraception services

This section explains the choices you have to help you find the contraception service that's most suitable for you.

## Q Is contraception free and where can I go to get it?

A You can obtain **free** contraception, including emergency contraception, from:

- a general practice, unless they say they don't provide contraception services
- a contraception (family planning) clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- a young people's service (these will have an upper age limit)
- some GUM clinics.

You can also get free emergency contraception from:

- most NHS walk-in centres (England only) and minor injuries units
- some hospital accident and emergency departments (phone first to check)
- some pharmacies (there may be an age limit).

Contraception is free even if your service gives you a prescription to take to the pharmacy.

Some pharmacists are able to provide a range of sexual health services including contraception. If you are 16 or over you can buy the emergency pill from most pharmacies for around £24. They also sell condoms, diaphragms, caps and spermicide.

You can also pay for some methods of contraception (including emergency contraception) at clinics run by **Marie Stopes** (helpline 0845 300 8090; [www.mariestopes.org.uk](http://www.mariestopes.org.uk)). You can buy emergency contraception at clinics run by **bpas** (helpline 0845 730 4030; [www.bpas.org](http://www.bpas.org)).

## Q Do services supply all methods of contraception?

**A** There are many different methods of contraception available. Health professionals can talk to you about them to help you choose the one that is best for you. They can also talk to you about safer sex. Not all services supply all methods – but they should be able to give you information about what contraceptive choices there are and where you can go to get them.

You can get information on each method of contraception from **fpa** (see back cover).

## Q What other services are available?

**A** Contraception services sometimes provide far more than contraception. This may include:

- pre-pregnancy advice/pregnancy testing
- help and advice on an unplanned pregnancy (including all pregnancy choices)
- safer sex advice
- advice on sexual problems
- cervical screening tests and breast awareness
- checks for sexually transmitted infections
- menopause advice
- infertility advice.

## What if I need emergency contraception?

If you have had unprotected sex, that is, sex without using contraception, or you think your contraception might have failed, you can use emergency contraception. There are two methods:

- **Emergency hormonal pill.** This must be taken up to three days (72 hours) after sex. It is more effective the earlier it is taken after sex.
- **An IUD.** This is a small plastic and copper device that is put into your womb by a specially trained doctor or nurse. It can be fitted up to five days after unprotected sex at any time in the menstrual cycle, provided this is the **only** unprotected sex that has occurred since your last period. If you have had unprotected sex more than once since your last period then an IUD can be fitted up to five days after the earliest time you could have released an egg (ovulation).

If you act quickly, emergency contraception will usually prevent pregnancy. See Is contraception free and where can I go to get it? on page 7.

## Sexually transmitted infection services

This section explains where you can get help and advice if you think you might have a sexually transmitted infection or would like a check-up.

## Q What is a sexually transmitted infection?

**A** Some infections can pass to another person through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex and through sharing sex toys. Infections spread in this way are known as sexually transmitted infections.

Safer sex involves using condoms correctly every time you have sex. If you don't use a condom you are more at risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

You don't need to have lots of sexual partners to get an infection.

## Q Can they be treated?

**A** Most sexually transmitted infections can be treated and it is usually best if treatment is started as soon as possible. Some infections, such as HIV, genital warts and genital herpes, never leave the body but there are drugs available that can reduce the symptoms and help prevent or delay the development of complications. If left untreated, many sexually transmitted infections can be painful or uncomfortable, and can permanently damage your health and fertility, and can be passed on to someone else.

## Q How will I know if I have an infection?

**A** Not everyone who has a sexually transmitted infection has signs and/or

symptoms. Sometimes these don't appear for weeks or months and sometimes they go away, but you can still have the infection and pass it on to someone else. If you experience any of the following you should seek advice:

- unusual discharge from the vagina
- discharge from the penis
- pain or burning when you pass urine
- itches, rashes, lumps or blisters around the genitals or anus
- pain and/or bleeding during sex
- bleeding between periods (including women who are using hormonal contraception)
- bleeding after sex
- pain in the testicles or lower abdomen.

Even if you don't have any signs and/or symptoms you may wish to seek advice or have a check-up, particularly if:

- you have had unprotected sex with a new partner recently
- you or your sexual partner have sex with other people without using a condom
- your sexual partner has any symptoms
- you are planning a pregnancy and may have been at risk of infection.

## Q Where can I go if I am worried I might have an infection?

**A** You can get all tests and treatments at a GUM or sexual health clinic. General practices, contraception clinics, young people's services and some pharmacies may also provide testing for some infections. If they can't provide what you need, they will be able to give you details

of the nearest service that can.

All advice, information and tests are free, but if you go to a general practice you may have to pay a prescription charge for any treatment.

## Q How will I be tested for sexually transmitted infections?

A Tests for both men and women may include:

- An examination of your genitals, mouth, anus, rectum (back passage) and skin to look for obvious signs of infection.
- Testing a sample of your urine.
- Having blood taken.
- Taking swabs from the urethra (tube where you urinate) and any sores or blisters.
- Taking swabs from the throat and the rectum. This is less common.

In women the tests might also include:

- Taking swabs from the vagina and cervix (entrance to the womb).
- Having an internal examination.

## Q What will I be tested for?

A You will not automatically be tested for all infections. All tests are optional and should only be done with your permission. Sometimes you will get the results straightaway, and sometimes you will have to wait. The service will explain how you will get the results.

You can also get information about sexually

transmitted infections from **fpa** (back cover) and the **Sexual Health Line** (page 4).

## Q What other services do GUM and sexual health clinics provide?

A In addition to tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections, there may be other services available, such as:

- special sessions for people who have been sexually assaulted
- psychosexual counselling (to help with sexual problems)
- hepatitis B vaccination.

## How can I protect myself against sexually transmitted infections?

- Use male or female condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
- If you have oral sex, cover the penis with a condom or the female genitals, or the male or female anus, with a latex square (dam).
- If you are not sure how to use condoms correctly contact **fpa** (see back cover).
- Avoid sharing sex toys. If you do share them, wash them or cover them with a new condom before anyone else uses them.

## Planning a pregnancy

If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, this section can tell you where to go for help and advice.

## Q Why do I need to plan for pregnancy?

- A** Both women and men need to be as healthy as possible before trying for a baby. There are services that can give you more information and advice about:
- stopping your contraception
  - healthy eating and exercise
  - taking folic acid
  - smoking, alcohol and recreational drug use
  - whether any medicines you are taking are unsafe during pregnancy
  - getting a test to see whether you are immune to rubella (German measles)
  - getting tested for sexually transmitted infections.

You can get information and advice from a general practice, contraception clinic, young people's service, sexual health clinic, pharmacist or **fpa** (see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3). Also see **fpa**'s leaflet *Planning a pregnancy*.

## Q What should I do once I am pregnant?

- A** You will need to make an appointment to see a doctor so that you can get the antenatal care you need. If you are not already registered with a general practice see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3.

The following organisations may also be of help when you are planning a pregnancy and once you are pregnant:

- **Tommy's, the baby charity** Information line: 0870 777 3060. [www.tommys.org](http://www.tommys.org).
- **NHS Pregnancy Smoking Helpline**  
Helpline: 0800 169 0 169.  
[www.gosmokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.gosmokefree.nhs.uk).
- **Frank** – information and help for drug and alcohol users. Helpline: 0800 776 600.  
[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com).

## Unplanned pregnancy

This section explains where you can go for help and advice if you are pregnant and are not sure you want a baby.

## Q I think I might be pregnant – what should I do?

- A** If you think you could be pregnant you should do a pregnancy test as soon as possible. You can do a home test, which you can buy from the pharmacy or supermarket, or you can ask for a test at your general practice, any young people's service, a contraceptive service, a sexual health clinic, a pharmacy (there may be a charge), most NHS walk-in centres and some GUM clinics.

You can carry out a pregnancy test from the first day of a missed period. Tests that are done earlier than this may not be accurate. If you don't have regular periods, the earliest time to do a test is 21 days from the last time that you had unprotected sex.



## Q I've had a positive pregnancy test – what are my choices?

A If the test is positive, this means you are pregnant. All pregnancy tests, when carried out correctly, are reliable, including home tests. You now need to think about what you want to do. You can choose to:

- continue with the pregnancy and keep the baby
- end the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue with the pregnancy and have the baby adopted.

## Q What should I do if I decide to continue with the pregnancy?

A You will need to make an appointment to see a doctor so that you can get the antenatal care you need. If you are not already registered with a general practice see *How can I find where my nearest service is?* on page 3.

For more information about pregnancy care see *Planning a pregnancy* on page 13.

If you think you want to have the baby adopted, find out about this as soon as you can so that you can get the right information and support. Contact the **British Association for Adoption and Fostering**. Tel: 020 7421 2600, [www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk), or see [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk), the Department for Children, Schools and Families' website.

## Q What should I do if I want an abortion?

A There are many reasons why some women feel that they are unable to continue with the pregnancy. For more information see *Abortion services* below.

## Q Who can help me with my decision?

A Ultimately the decision about what to do is yours. Talking to people you trust and having accurate information can help. You may wish to talk to family and friends or it might be easier to talk to someone who is not so close to you. Your general practice, contraception clinic, young people's service and **fpa** can talk to you about how you feel about the pregnancy and the choices you have (see also **fpa**'s leaflet *Pregnant and don't know what to do?*). You can also discuss your options with other services but they will charge a fee (see page 18).

## Abortion services

This section explains where to go for help and advice if you are pregnant and want an abortion.

## Q Who can have an abortion?

A Abortion is legal in the UK regardless of your age. How easy it is to arrange an abortion can vary throughout the UK, and it can be very difficult to get an abortion in Northern Ireland.

Abortion is safer and easier the earlier it is done in pregnancy. If you think you may wish to have an abortion it is important to get advice as soon as possible.

You can get information on what happens when you have an abortion, from **fpa** (see back cover for details), the **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** ([www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)) and the organisations listed below.

#### ● **South Manchester Private Clinic.**

Tel: 0161 487 2660. [www.smpclinic.co.uk](http://www.smpclinic.co.uk).

There are some other organisations that offer pregnancy testing and counselling but believe that abortion is morally wrong. They will not provide balanced information and will counsel you against abortion.

## Sexual problems

This section explains where to go for help and advice if you are having sexual problems.

### Q Where can I go if I want an abortion?

**A** Abortion care is available free through the NHS, or through other clinics and hospitals for a fee (the cost will vary).

- You can go to your general practice, local contraception or sexual health clinic or young people's service. They can refer you for an abortion through the NHS (see How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3).
- Women in Northern Ireland can contact **fpa's** unplanned pregnancy service on 0845 122 8687. They will be able to advise you about getting a private abortion in England if that is what you decide to do.
- You can contact organisations directly that provide abortions for a fee – you do not need to be referred by another service. These include:
  - **bpas.** Tel: 0845 730 4030. [www.bpas.org](http://www.bpas.org).
  - **Marie Stopes.** Tel: 0845 300 8090. [www.mariestopes.org](http://www.mariestopes.org).
  - **Calthorpe Clinic.** Tel: 0121 455 7585. [www.calthorpe-clinic.co.uk](http://www.calthorpe-clinic.co.uk).

### Q What is a sexual problem?

**A** Sometimes both men and women can have problems that affect their sex life. These include:

- loss of interest in sex
- being unable to get or keep an erection
- premature ejaculation (coming too soon)
- pain during sexual intercourse or difficulty with penetration
- difficulty having an orgasm.

### Q Why do sexual problems occur?

**A** Sexual problems can have physical or psychological causes, sometimes both. Physical reasons include illness, infection or side effects from medications. Psychological causes can be linked to relationship difficulties, uncertainties about whether you are gay,

straight or bisexual, and previous sexual experiences. Many sexual problems are temporary.

## Q Where can I go for help and advice?

The first step is to talk to someone about your problem. This could be at your general practice, contraception service, GUM or sexual health clinic or a helpline.

Some contraception services and some GUM and sexual health clinics offer psychosexual counselling. Your general practice may also be able to refer you to a counsellor on the NHS, but there might be a waiting list. The following organisations have useful information and can help you access relationship and psychosexual counselling. They will charge a fee – you can phone them to find out the cost.

- **Relate.** Tel: 0845 456 1310. [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk).
- **British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy.** Tel: 020 8543 2707. [www.basrt.org.uk](http://www.basrt.org.uk).
- **Sexual Dysfunction Association.** Helpline: 0870 774 3571. [www.sda.uk.net](http://www.sda.uk.net).

## Sexual assault services

This section explains where you can go for help and advice if you have been sexually assaulted.

## Q What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any kind of sexual activity that you do not agree to. It can include:

- inappropriate touching
- vaginal, oral or anal penetration that you have said no to
- rape.

Sexual assault can happen to men or women of any age. The attacker may be male or female, a stranger or someone you know, and a sexual assault can take place anywhere, including in your home or workplace.

## Q Where can I go for help if I've been sexually assaulted?

Being sexually assaulted can be a very distressing and frightening experience. This can make it feel hard to get the help you need, but there are services that can help. You do not have to tell anyone about the assault if you don't want to, but you should seek medical advice as soon as possible as you may be at risk of a sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy.

The services listed below can provide medical care, will take you seriously and will help you get any other support you need (including emotional support). These services are free – you can go there without a referral from another service and they will not tell the police if you do not want them to.

- A sexual assault referral centre – a 24-hour

one-stop specialist service where you can receive medical care and counselling, quickly.

- A hospital accident and emergency department.
- A GUM clinic.
- Your general practice.
- A contraception or young people's service.

See How can I find where my nearest service is? on page 3 or [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) for details of sexual assault referral centres.

## Q What will happen if I report the assault to the police?

A If you decide to tell the police, you will be seen by a specially trained police officer and a specially trained doctor. See [www.met.police.uk](http://www.met.police.uk) for further information.

## Q Who else can help me?

A The following organisations can also give you details of services you might need and may be able to provide some counselling and support. If the assault took place a long time ago they can still help you:

- **Rape Crisis** (in England and Wales). [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk).
- **Rape Crisis Scotland**. Tel: 08088 01 03 02. [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk).
- **Rape Crisis Northern Ireland**. Tel: 028 9032 9001.
- **Rape Crisis Network Ireland**. Helpline: 1800 77 88 88. [www.rcni.ie](http://www.rcni.ie).
- **Survivors UK** (for men and boys who have

been sexually assaulted). Helpline: 0845 122 1201. [www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org).

- **Rights of Women** (runs a Sexual Violence Legal Advice line). Tel: 020 7251 8887. [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk).

## About fpa's confidential helpline

Helpline: 0845 122 8690 (9am to 6pm Monday to Friday). Calls are charged at a local call rate and will show up on your phone bill. Calls are monitored at times to help us improve the service we provide.

**You can ring us about** contraception, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy choices, abortion and planning a pregnancy.

### When you ring we will

- listen to you
- not judge you
- treat you with respect
- give you up to date information
- support you in making choices about your sexual health.

**Your call will be confidential.** We don't ask for your name and address and if you want us to send you further information we don't keep a record of your details. We only share information about your call outside the helpline service if you want us to or we believe that you or someone else is seriously at risk of harm. We will always tell you if we feel we need to do this and we will ask for your permission.

**We welcome all** feedback and have a complaints policy.

# How fpa can help you

**sexual health direct** is a nationwide service run by **fpa**. It provides:

- confidential information and advice and a wide range of booklets on individual methods of contraception, common sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy choices, abortion and planning a pregnancy
- details of contraception clinics, sexual health clinics and genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics.

## fpa helplines

### England

helpline 0845 122 8690

*9am to 6pm Monday to Friday*

### Northern Ireland

helpline 0845 122 8687

*9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 4.30 pm Friday*

or visit **fpa's** website **[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)**

## A final word

This booklet can only give you basic information about sexual health services. The information is based on information available at the time this booklet was printed. Different people may give you different information on certain points.

**Remember** – contact a health professional if you are worried or unsure about anything.



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