

# Avoiding HIV

Everyone knows that condoms and other barriers are the *best* way to lower your risk for getting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS. However, there are some other things you can do...

There are some parts of your body that need to stay healthy. They are called *mucous membranes*.

## What are mucous membranes?

*They are the moist areas that lead in and out of your body.*

- **the urethra** (the tube that urine passes through)
- **the vagina and the cervix** (the opening to the uterus or womb)
- **the anus and the rectum** (inside the bum)
- **the mouth, the throat, the eyes and the nose.**

Mucous membranes are not healthy when they are irritated or infected.

## What can cause irritation and/or inflammation to mucous membranes?

- Smoking tobacco or crack cocaine irritates the mouth and the throat.
- Spermicides irritate the vagina, urethra and rectum/anus.
- Douching irritates the vagina.
- Enemas irritate the anus and rectum.
- Vigorous sex can irritate the vagina or anus, especially when they are not well lubricated.
- Infections like trichomonas, yeast or bacterial vaginosis (BV) can irritate the vagina.
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) like gonorrhea, chlamydia and herpes can irritate *any* mucous membrane, such as the mouth, throat, vagina and anus/rectum.

## How can I keep these membranes healthy?

- Get tested for STIs if you have had sex without using a condom or another barrier.
- Use condoms every time you have oral sex on a man, vaginal or anal sex. A latex barrier can be used for oral sex on a woman.
- Use a water-based lubricant for vaginal and anal sex.
- Avoid using spermicide.
- Do not douche.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Do not use an enema before anal sex.

## Why is it important to get tested for STIs?

Untreated STIs greatly increase your risk for getting HIV from an infected person. If you have had unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex, you could have an STI and not know it. Most women and many men don't have any symptoms of infection.

## Make sure you see a doctor if you have any of the following:

- unusual discharge from your vagina
- irritation, itching or sores on your genitals or in your mouth
- burning when you urinate or
- if you have had unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex.

### Other info sheets in this series:

*Avoiding bladder infections*

*Avoiding vaginal infections*

*Avoiding yeast infections*

*Dealing with Bacterial vaginosis*

*Normal vaginal fluids*

**AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine**

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