

AGREEMENTS IN RELATIONSHIPS

The essential guide for gay men in relationships who want to stop using condoms when they have sex with each other



THIS BOOKLET IS NOT DESIGNED FOR HIV POSITIVE MEN IN RELATIONSHIPS. POSITIVE MEN IN RELATIONSHIPS WHO WANT TO FUCK WITHOUT CONDOMS SHOULD GET INDIVIDUAL ADVICE FROM THEIR HIV MEDICAL CONSULTANT ON THE POSSIBLE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO POSSIBLE REINFECTION WITH A DIFFERENT AND POSSIBLY DRUG-RESISTANT STRAIN OF HIV.

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The essential guide for gay men in relationships who want to stop using condoms when they have sex with each other

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NEGOTIATED

SAFETY AGREEMENTS

NEGOTIATED SAFETY AGREEMENTS

A negotiated safety agreement is an agreement between two gay men in a relationship to go through the process of getting ready to stop using condoms when they fuck together.

The theory of an agreement is that if both of you know each other's HIV status and you are both negative and the only time you don't use condoms is when you fuck each other, then that will be an acceptable safer sex option for both of you.

What are the two basic ingredients for every negotiated safety agreement?

- 1 Both partners must know their own and their partner's HIV status.
- 2 There must be no unprotected fucking outside the relationship.

These basic components are absolutely essential and are not negotiable. There can be no assumptions about HIV status, and fucking outside the relationship without a condom is definitely out of the question.

(Continued overleaf)

Many gay men in relationships do not want to use condoms when they fuck each other, but they need to make an agreement to make that experience as safe as possible

NEGOTIATED SAFETY AGREEMENTS

How important is our negotiated safety agreement?

You are not just agreeing to fuck with your partner without condoms, you are also agreeing to trust your partner and trust yourself to make fucking without condoms as safe as possible for both of you.

That means you have to trust that you know each other well enough, you have to trust that you can deal with difficult situations together and you have to trust that an agreement between you can really work.

Normally if you are going to fuck, it's the condom that gives you protection from HIV. If you agree not to use condoms, it will be your agreement that has to protect the sexual health of both of you. So the agreement has to be strong.

How well does a negotiated safety agreement protect against HIV?

Some things in life can't be measured that well.

Even if you are using condoms all the time, we know there's still a very small chance of HIV being passed on when condoms break or slip off, or during unprotected oral sex. As with many other aspects of life, gay men accept these small risks because they enjoy and value the experience.

Agreements break easier than condoms, so it's important to acknowledge that, overall, a negotiated safety agreement does not protect against HIV as well as consistent condom use. Having said that, many gay men in relationships do not want to use condoms when they fuck each other, so the purpose of this booklet is to help make that experience as safe as possible.

What are the benefits of an agreement of this sort?

For more information about the most common reasons gay men have for making an agreement, check out [Never too late](#) (page 8-9) or [Fresh start](#) (page 10-11).

Is there a standard agreement we can use?

No. All couples have unique needs and desires, and every agreement needs to be tailor-made. For more information about making an agreement check out [Making it work: the agreement questionnaire](#) (starting on page 12).

If you agree not to use condoms, it will be your agreement that has to protect the sexual health of both of you. So the agreement has to be strong



BACK TO BASICS

BACK TO BASICS

If you and your partner are going to enter into a negotiated safety agreement not to use condoms, you must first make sure that you both understand the basic facts about safer sex and about taking an HIV test.

HIV testing

A decade ago, it was debatable whether it was worth the trouble for sexually active gay men to take a test for HIV, the virus which can cause AIDS.

These days there's simply no advantage in not knowing your HIV status. Effective treatments are available; viral load monitoring allows you to decide the best time to start treatment; and knowledge of status offers gay men additional safer sex options.

Having a negotiated safety agreement is now considered a viable safer sex option, but it is absolutely dependent on knowledge of HIV status. You both need to know that you are both HIV negative and that both of you will have safer protected sex outside of your relationship.

You can take an HIV test on a completely confidential basis at the sexual health clinic of your choice.

Safer sex

Most gay men in relationships who make a negotiated safety agreement will continue to have sex with other men, so it's essential to keep well informed about safer sex. There's not just HIV to be aware of. You should also be well informed about the range of other sexually transmitted infections.

Using condoms when you fuck is the best way to avoid HIV infection, and they also help to protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

NEVER TOO LATE

Me and my partner have already fucked without a condom....

First of all, don't panic! Even if one of you is positive, one unprotected fuck doesn't guarantee your partner will become infected.

Well... actually, we've fucked without a condom more than once.

OK, that makes it much more important for you to get the situation sorted. Whatever you do, don't just assume the worst and keep fucking without condoms.

What can we do?

It's important for both of you to get proper advice about HIV testing so you can decide whether or not to take a test and then make an informed decision about fucking without condoms. Make an appointment to see a health adviser at your preferred sexual health clinic and take it from there.


So it's not too late for us to make an agreement?

Definitely not.

But, remember, knowing your HIV status is only one part of a negotiated safety agreement. You will still need to make important decisions about what you both expect from your agreement.

You might like to start off by reading the section called **Making it work: the agreement questionnaire** (starting on page 12), or you could wait until you see a sexual health adviser at a sexual health clinic.

NEVER TOO LATE



If you've already fucked without a condom, it's not too late to make an agreement



FRESH START

Are you ready to accept responsibility for maintaining an agreement that your health and life will depend on?

FRESH START

If you're in love and in a new relationship, making a proper agreement on whether or not to use condoms can bring you even closer together.

Lust can make you do some crazy things, but when it comes to irrational behaviour nothing compares to love.

When you start a new relationship you discover many things about yourself as well as each other.

A new relationship can open up many new opportunities and the chance to explore new sexual experiences.

The sense of intimacy and trust which a relationship can nurture may lead you to believe that you and your partner have a greater sense of agreement than you actually do.

It's not surprising that if you assume you're both HIV negative, it might feel a bit clinical to sit down and discuss an agreement about using or not using condoms, but the benefits of going through this process can make it worthwhile.

Are you ready to accept responsibility for maintaining an agreement that your health and life will depend on?

Having a clear agreement will increase your chances of protecting your own and your partner's health.

And working the agreement out between yourselves could help you understand each other so much more and bring you closer together.



MAKING IT WORK:

the agreement questionnaire

MAKING IT WORK

Whatever your reasons for wanting to stop using condoms in your relationship, having a clear agreement will increase your chances of protecting your own and your partner's health.

It's important to remember that there's more to having a successful agreement to stop using condoms than simply having an HIV test.

The success of every agreement will depend on who is making the agreement, what you expect from each other, what practical steps you agree to take to make the agreement work and whether you can agree on what to do if your situation changes in the future.

The next eight pages of this booklet are made up of "The Agreement Questionnaire" which will help you discuss some of these points with your partner.

Some of the things you will need to consider are:

- how you and your partner make and maintain important agreements in your relationship
- what you both expect from your new agreement to stop using condoms
- how the agreement will affect your risk of catching other sexually transmitted infections
- your confidence in each other's ability to acknowledge mistakes
- how you will assess the success of your agreement

Don't assume you already know the answers to the questions in each section – there are no right or wrong answers – every couple will have a different set of expectations, and every agreement will reflect the different people involved.

There's more to having a successful agreement to stop using condoms than simply having an HIV test

How to use the agreement questionnaire

If you are using this booklet at home, you should first read **Back to basics** (pages 6-7) and either **Never too late** (pages 8-9) or **Fresh start** (pages 10-11) before you start work with your partner on "The Agreement Questionnaire".

The questionnaire has four sections which each contain questions and discussion points that you and your partner should talk about when working out your agreement. Try not to rush the process of making an agreement. Be forthright about your needs and expectations, and respect your partner's.

Writing down some notes might help you to keep track of your discussion. Use your notes to help you build up a clear agreement on what you want and how it will work.

At the end of each section, try to make a statement that sums up your discussion and what you have agreed on.

Start with **About us**, then work your way through **Our expectations**, then **Practical steps**, and finish with **A few months from now**.

If you find you are having difficulty agreeing on any of the discussion points, you can make an appointment with a sexual health adviser at a sexual health clinic and take it from there.

MAKING IT WORK



THE AGREEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE: PART ONE

ABOUT US: Who are we?

If you and your partner are thinking about making an agreement not to use condoms in your relationship, the following questions will help you to work out how well you really know each other.

- How would you describe your relationship?
- In what areas of your lives does either of you have an advantage over the other?
- What has been your past experience of making agreements with each other?
- How do you usually talk to each other about important things or uncomfortable situations?
- What do you know about each other's HIV status, drug-taking and sexual history?
- How well informed are you about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhoea, herpes or hepatitis?

Notes:

Use this space to make notes of your discussion.

Use the space below to write down the conclusions of your discussion.

We are... _____

THE AGREEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE: PART TWO

OUR EXPECTATIONS: What do we want from each other?

The following questions will help you work out what you are expecting each other to do and not to do if you make an agreement about not using condoms in your relationship.

- Under what circumstances would you consider allowing your partner to have sex with other people in the future?
- What risks are you prepared to take when you have sex with other people? What risks do you accept that your partner is allowed to take?
- Under what circumstances will you use condoms with other sex partners in the future?
- What will you tell each other about sex outside the relationship?
- How confident are you that you could tell your partner that something had happened that may have exposed you to HIV or a sexually transmitted infection?

Notes:

Use this space to make notes of your discussion.

Use the space below to write down the conclusions of your discussion.

We will... _____

THE AGREEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE: PART THREE

PRACTICAL STEPS: How will it work?

If you and your partner are making an agreement not to use condoms in your relationship, there are some practical things you need to agree on. And it's better if you don't just assume that you will agree with each other. You need to be explicit. Say it out loud to each other, or write it down if that makes it clearer to both of you.

- **HIV testing**
Depending on the level of risk you both accept, you will need to consider how often you have HIV tests in the future. Do you both agree?
- **Sexual health checkups**
If either of you has sex outside the relationship you will need to have regular checkups for sexually transmitted infections. Do you both agree?
- **Communication**
Any agreement you make will increase the need to talk openly about sex and your relationship. Do you both agree?

Notes:

Use this space to make notes of your discussion.

Use the space below to write down the conclusions of your discussion.

We will... _____

THE AGREEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE: PART FOUR

A FEW MONTHS FROM NOW: What will we do if things go wrong?

Sometimes people do things they didn't plan. So despite your commitment to the agreement you are making now, it's possible that in the future you or your partner will have to disclose something that's embarrassing or difficult to talk about. The following questions will help you both be prepared for that eventuality and make it easier for you to admit mistakes.

Reporting slip-ups

- How would you tell your partner if you broke the agreement?
- How would you respond if your partner told you he had done something which broke the agreement?
- How would you tell your partner if a condom broke while you were having sex with someone else?

Changing the agreement in the future

- Relationships change over time, so it's realistic to expect you will need to consider changing your agreement in the future. If you agree to do that together when the time comes, you're less likely to break the first agreement or to feel your trust has been betrayed. Setting a time at some point in the future to review your agreement is a good way to make sure it remains a workable agreement. Do you agree?

Notes:

Use this space to make notes of your discussion.

Use the space below to write down the conclusions of your discussion.

If we have any slip-ups we will... _____

We will review our agreement... _____



COUNSELLING FOR COUPLES

COUNSELLING FOR COUPLES

If you and your partner feel that you need to talk to a counsellor together about your relationship, there are many different options:

- Two gay organisations, PACE (the Project for Advice, Counselling and Education) in north London and HGLC (the Healthy Gay Living Centre) in south London both run very popular counselling sessions for couples.
- PACE can be contacted on 020 7700 1323. They also have a register of gay and lesbian counsellors.
- HGLC can be contacted on 020 7407 3550.
- London Marriage Guidance and Relate are also gay-friendly.
- London Marriage Guidance can be contacted on 020 7580 1087 and Relate on 01788 573241. Or check out the Relate website at www.relate.org.uk
- Blackliners (020 7738 7468/5274) offers free counselling to black gay men.
- Numerous private counsellors advertise a range of different services in the classified section of the free gay weekly Pink Paper.
- Be sure to check whether your counsellor is a member of the counselling organisations, BACP or UKCP.
- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy has extensive listings of counsellors on its own website at www.bac.co.uk and you can search for ones in your area.
- You could also ask to speak to a sexual health adviser at your sexual health clinic when you go there.

OVER TO YOU

Congratulations! You and your partner have now reached the end of our crash course on how to agree to stop using condoms with each other and still protect your sexual health.

Or maybe only one of you has read this far and now you need to both sit down and read it through together.

We hope that the booklet has made it clear to you that a negotiated safety agreement can be an acceptable safer sex option for you in your relationship.

We also hope that we have helped you to discuss the agreement so that if you do want to stop using condoms, you can do so without putting your sexual health at risk.

The remaining pages of this booklet list sexual health clinics where you can go to take an HIV test in strict confidence. (If you want to take the test together, ask the clinic about it.) We have also listed clinics which hold gay-only sessions. And we have listed clinics which offer a same-day HIV testing service which can give you your results within hours.

Taking the test will be just the first step for both of you in coming to a mutually acceptable and safe agreement on not using condoms in your relationship.

Remember! It's the strength of the agreement which will protect you and your partner in the future, so if you want to talk about it with an expert before you go any further, you can discuss it (alone or with your partner) with the sexual health adviser at the sexual health clinic.

Good luck to both of you!

OVER TO YOU



Remember! It's the strength of the agreement which will protect you and your partner in the future

SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

Here are the contact numbers for some of the sexual health clinics in London and the six clinics which have special sessions for gay men. A complete list of all London's sexual health clinics can be found on the freedoms website at www.freedoms.org.uk

Sexual health clinics for gay men

After Five

Tuesdays 5pm – 7:30pm
Wednesday 1pm – 7:30pm
The Lloyd Clinic
Guy's Hospital SE1
020 7955 2108

Axis *(26 years and under only)*

Thursdays 7pm – 9pm
Mortimer Market Centre
Capper Street WC1
020 7530 5050/5061

East One Clinic

Thursdays 6:45pm – 8:30pm
Ambrose King Centre
Royal London Hospital E1
020 7377 7313

Pond Street Clinic

Tuesdays 4pm – 6pm
Marlborough Clinic
Royal Free Hospital NW3
020 7830 2047

Rainbow Clinic

Wednesdays 5pm – 7:40pm
The Caldecot Centre
Kings Healthcare SE5
020 7346 3448

Zone 15

Tuesdays 5:45pm – 7:30pm
St Ann's Sexual Health Clinic
St Ann's Hospital N15
020 8442 6536

Sexual health clinics in London

Camberwell SE5

The Caldecot Centre
020 7346 3453

Central London WC1

Mortimer Market Centre
020 7530 5050

Central London SE1

The Lydia Clinic
020 7955 2108

City EC1

Bart's Sexual Health Clinic
020 7601 8090

Chelsea SW10

John Hunter Clinic
020 8846 6171

Hammersmith W6

West London Centre
for Sexual Health
020 8846 1576

Hampstead NW3

Marlborough Clinic
020 7830 2047

Highgate N19

The Archway Clinic
020 7530 5800

London Bridge SE1

The Lloyd Clinic
020 7955 2108

Paddington W2

Jefferiss Wing
020 7886 1225

Tooting SW17

GU Medicine
020 8725 3353

Tottenham N15

St Ann's Sexual Health Clinic
020 8442 6536

Victoria SW1P

Victoria Clinic
020 8746 8066

Whitechapel E1

Ambrose King Centre
020 7377 7306/07

Woolwich SE18

Trafalgar Clinic
020 8836 5767/8



SAME-DAY HIV TESTING CENTRES

On certain days of the week, the centres listed below offer a same-day HIV testing service which will give you the result of your test within hours. Same-day testing is by appointment only, so telephone in advance.

Barnet
Claire Simpson House
020 8216 4110
Monday

Chelsea
St Stephen's Centre
020 8846 6171/6154
Tuesday (*gay men only*)

Ealing
Ealing Hospital
020 8967 5555
Wednesday

Enfield
Town Clinic
020 8370 2550
Monday

Hammersmith
Charing Cross Hospital
020 8846 1577
Tuesday

Hampstead
The Royal Free Hospital
020 7431 0970
Tuesday and Thursday

Harringay/Tottenham
St Ann's Hospital
020 8442 6464
Monday to Friday

Harrow
Northwick Park Hospital
020 8869 3142
Tuesday

Hillingdon
Hillingdon Hospital
01895 279537
Wednesday

London Bridge
Guy's Hospital
020 7955 2108
Monday, Wednesday and
Thursday

Paddington
St Mary's Hospital
020 7886 1225
Tuesday

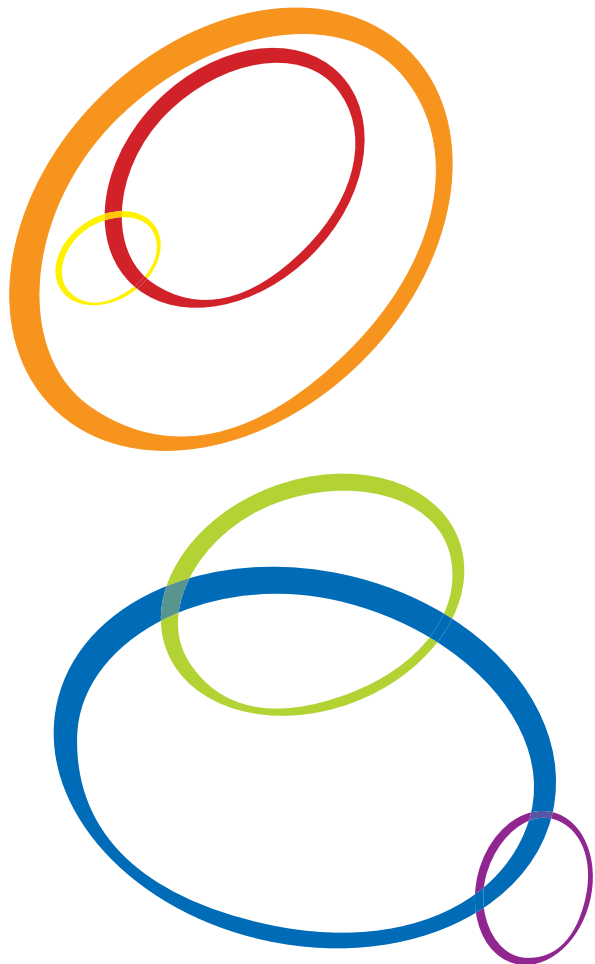
Sutton
St Helier Hospital
020 8296 2543
Thursday

Tooting
St George's Hospital
020 8725 3140
Monday to Friday

Victoria
Victoria Clinic for
Sexual Health
020 8746 8066
Monday, Tuesday and
Thursday

Whitechapel
Royal London Hospital
020 7377 7311
Monday

Woolwich
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
020 8836 5767
Tuesday and Thursday



BROWSE

our health advice section for everything you need to know about HIV, safer sex, condoms and sexually transmitted infections

READ

all about how to stay safe on drugs... including everything you need to know about steroids and mixing club drugs with anti-HIV treatments

SEARCH

the freedoms 'Advice Shop' for contact details of gay organisations which can help with all sorts of problems which you may have

WIN PRIZES

... your chance to win free condoms, free books and free perfume

GET ADVICE

from the freedoms doctor, the freedoms agony uncle and the freedoms community police officer – and send your questions for them to answer

FIND OUT

where your local London sexual health clinic is and how to contact it

CHECK OUT

where your local London police community safety unit is and where to report anti-gay violence and abuse

FIND THE NUMBERS

of all the London gay, lesbian, bisexual and HIV/AIDS helplines

freedom's™

...for when you're out.

