



WHAT IS A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

A sexual health check is a check-up by a health practitioner for sexual health issues, like sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For women, this might involve a pap smear. It also gives you the chance to ask questions about sexual and reproductive health and your rights.

WHO CAN PERFORM A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

A sexual health check is carried out by a health practitioner — your GP, or the nurse, can order sexual health screening tests. They can discuss with you what may be required.

WHO NEEDS A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

Anyone who is sexually active is advised to talk to their health practitioner about having check-ups. How often and when you need to have a check-up depends on your lifestyle and sexual activity. A sexual health check is advisable if any of the following circumstances apply to you:

- If you think you might have an STI
- If you have had unsafe sex, including vaginal, oral and anal sex
- If you have had a condom break or fall off during sex
- If you or your partner have more than one sexual partner
- If you have started a new relationship.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

A health practitioner will usually begin by taking a sexual history. Some of the questions they will ask may seem quite personal, like:

- How many sexual partners have you had
- Sexual activities you have engaged in
- If you have sex with men, women or both
- Whether you have any symptoms

You might feel uncomfortable about telling the truth when answering certain questions, but your health professional needs to know as it might affect what treatment you might need. Some STIs can lead to long term health problems if not treated properly.

A process called contact tracing might need to occur if you test positive to certain types of STIs (such as HIV).

Contact tracing is the process of identifying how an infection might have spread from person to person. The practitioner may ask you for contact details of the people who you have had sexual contact with, so that they can be tested and treated as well.

During an examination (with your consent), your external genital area may be examined for any signs of STIs. A range of tests may be done, including:

- Urine sample
- Blood tests (taken from your arm)
- Swabs (taking a sample of fluid or discharge with a cotton bud)
- For women, a vaginal examination might also be performed, such as a Pap test (a swab of the cervix, which is inside the vagina). A pap test is a routine procedure that all sexually active women are advised to have every 5 years.

ASKING QUESTIONS

A sexual health check is a good opportunity to ask any questions you have about your sexual health, or to discuss anything that has been worrying you. As with all your information, anything discussed with your health practitioner is held in strict confidence.

Source: FPA Australia

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