

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

Six Basic Facts Seniors Need to Know about STIs*

***STIs stands for sexually transmitted infections, aka STDs, or sexually transmitted diseases. In our youth, these were called “venereal diseases.” STIs are a fact of life for seniors; here are some facts you need to know.**

- 1. STIs are increasing dramatically among older adults.** In the past decade, the numbers of diagnoses have doubled for many STIs and tripled for some others, among older adults, ages 55 to 64. About one-third of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the US are 50 years of age or older. That number will continue to increase as people with HIV/AIDS live longer. Longer life is good news, but unfortunately, a lot of those people don't even know they're infected!
- 2. Condoms, especially when used with lubrication, are highly effective at protecting you from STIs.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC,) Latex condoms used consistently and correctly provide a virtually impenetrable barrier to STI viruses and bacteria. It's especially important to use personal lubricant with condoms as vaginal tissues become drier and more easily irritated with age (anal tissues need extra lubrication, too). Dryness leads to irritation, which can cause condoms to break and make it easier for bacteria and virus to enter the skin.
- 3. People may look “clean” and feel fine and still transmit STIs, including HIV, to a sex partner.** Lots of people living with STIs have no symptoms. Getting tested is the only way to know if you have an STI.
- 4. While many older adults seek healthcare frequently, doctors often fail to test them for STIs.** Your healthcare provider may assume you aren't having sex or may be uncomfortable asking about your sexual activity. You and your doctor may confuse the symptoms associated with STIs, even HIV, as signs of the aging process or other illnesses. If you're sexually active, ask to be tested.
- 5. There is treatment for all STIs, and many can be cured.** STIs caused by bacteria can be cured. Currently, there is no cure for viral STIs like HIV and herpes or HPV, the virus that causes genital warts. Viral Hepatitis B and C may be sexually transmitted. Treatments can make all of these STIs manageable -- even HIV! The sooner any STI is diagnosed, the better your treatment results can be.
- 6. There are many places you can get tested for HIV and other STIs.** If you don't feel comfortable going to your private doctor, find the nearest facility to your zip code for HIV/STI testing by visiting <http://www.hivtest.org> or calling 1-800-CDC-INFO.

There's a lot more to know about STIs. Check out these excellent websites for more information.

- <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/over50/resources/factsheets/over50.htm>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/latex.htm>
- <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/hiv-aids-and-older-people>
- <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/sexuality-later-life>

Author bio: Joan Garrity has spent 30+ years nurturing the ability of healthcare and social service providers to be more effective in addressing sexuality issues with clients, young and old. Her workshops provide concrete strategies participants can immediately apply to their work. Learn more about Joan at <http://www.joangarrity.com>

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