

# SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS **FOR YOU**

Available in  
several languages  
[www.sante-sexuelle.ch/shop](http://www.sante-sexuelle.ch/shop)



Dear Readers

This brochure is for you! It provides information about various topics concerning sexual and reproductive health. The first chapter is dedicated to sexual rights, which are derived from human rights. They are the basis of how we deal with sexual health issues.

Everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, should be able to express their sexuality freely and responsibly, and without constraints, with respect to themselves and their sexual partners. For this to be possible having knowledge and access to information is essential. This is why SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland has published this brochure in several languages.

If you have further questions, a sexual health centre in your area offers professional, impartial advice which is adapted to your needs.

Enjoy reading and exploring this guide.

Barbara Berger, Managing Director SEXUAL HEALTH Switzerland



**ADVISORY SERVICES**

[www.sante-sexuelle.ch/centres](http://www.sante-sexuelle.ch/centres)

You can seek advice from a sexual health centre. They are found in most Swiss cantons. The centre nearest to you can be found by searching the above link.



**FOR DETAILED INFORMATION**

[www.sex-i.ch](http://www.sex-i.ch)

The sexual health info website provides information about sexual health issues in more than ten languages.



**BROCHURES AND OTHER MATERIALS**

[www.sante-sexuelle.ch/shop](http://www.sante-sexuelle.ch/shop)

Here you can find further information and brochures free of charge. You can also order male and female condoms from this website.

# YOUR RIGHTS

## SEXUAL RIGHTS

Sexual rights are based on recognised human rights, which are enshrined in national and international legislation. Sexual rights mean that every person, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or sexual identity:

- can express their sexuality free from coercion, discrimination and violence;
- receives the information and knowledge that they require;
- has access to advisory services and medical care;
- can practice sexual relations freely and on the basis of mutual consent;
- may opt for or against having children and may freely decide how many children they wish to have;
- can have a satisfying and pleasurable sexual life at minimal risk to themselves;
- has the right to bodily integrity;
- can freely choose their partners and can decide whether to marry;
- has the right to privacy and self-determination.

## RIGHT TO INFORMATION, ADVICE AND TREATMENT

No matter what your nationality is or what residence status you have, you have the right to information and access to advisory services and medical care. If you have difficulty understanding the language spoken, or require assistance with this, you can take someone with you to help when you attend an advisory service. Some advisory services work with intercultural interpreters. Like the advisors, the interpreters are bound to maintain confidentiality.

## SEXUALITY AND THE LAW

In Switzerland, the principle of voluntary participation applies to all sexual acts. Nobody can be forced to participate. Sexual acts experienced by anyone against their will are punishable by law. This may be physical violence (rape, sexual exploitation) and/or psychological violence (threats, coercion or sexual harassment). Sexual coercion or harassment can also occur via the Internet and is also illegal. The same rights apply if you are married or living in a same-sex partnership.



Sexual acts with children and minors under the age of 16 are prohibited except if the age difference between the two young people is less than three years. If a relationship of dependency exists (teacher, employer, caregiver), this regulation applies up to 18 years of age.

Everyone has the right to freedom from bodily harm. It is illegal to cut the genitals of girls and women (female genital mutilation, FGM), whether in Switzerland or abroad.

Forced marriage is illegal in Switzerland. Forced marriage is when a couple or one member of the couple is put under pressure to marry by those around them or by their family. A marriage can only take place when both future spouses agree to it entirely of their own free will. If one of the partners has been forced into a marriage, then it can be annulled. More information: [www.mariages-forces.ch](http://www.mariages-forces.ch) (German, French and Italian).

#### SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If you are being or have been exposed to violence, it is important to speak to someone about it and to get help. You can also get advice anonymously.

#### USEFUL ADDRESSES

Swiss National Victims' Help  
(German, French, Italian and English):  
[www.aide-aux-victimes.ch](http://www.aide-aux-victimes.ch)

Women's Shelters Switzerland  
(German and French):  
[www.solidarite-femmes.ch](http://www.solidarite-femmes.ch)

Information (French):  
[www.violencequefaire.ch](http://www.violencequefaire.ch)

Support helpline 24h (German, French and Italian): [www.143.ch](http://www.143.ch), tel. 143  
Emergency police number: tel. 117  
Emergency ambulance, first aid: tel. 144

Support and other addresses can be found at a centre for sexual health:  
[www.sante-sexuelle.ch](http://www.sante-sexuelle.ch)

#### HEALTH INSURANCE

In Switzerland, it is compulsory to take out health insurance. Your health insurance covers the cost of most treatments and advisory services at hospital or at a doctor's surgery. However, depending on your individual insurance you will need to pay some part of the costs. If you have no health insurance, ask about the costs of tests and treatment beforehand. In case of financial difficulties, you can contact the social services in your canton, or a sexual health centre. You can take out health insurance even without a valid residence permit.



# SEXUALITY AND PARTNERS

Sexuality is a part of life. It can contribute to well-being, both on an individual level as well as within a relationship if it is practised in a respectful way both to oneself and others. Our sexuality develops throughout our lifetime and depends on the cultural and social environment in which we live.

## RIGHT TO DECIDE ON YOUR SEXUALITY AND YOUR CHOICE OF PARTNER

Sex is not only sexual intercourse but also includes caressing, kissing, hugging and masturbation. Other practices may also be part of it, such as oral sex (stimulating the genitals with the mouth) or anal sex (inserting the penis into the anus), provided that both of those participating have consented. One can also decide not to engage in sex.

Each individual has the right to decide for themselves how and with whom they wish to practise their sexuality, with whom they enter into a partnership and who they wish to marry.

Sexual relations, and relationships between couples, can be between a man and a woman and equally between two women or two men. Same-sex couples can register their partnership at the civil register office (registered partnership).

## SEXUAL DIFFICULTIES

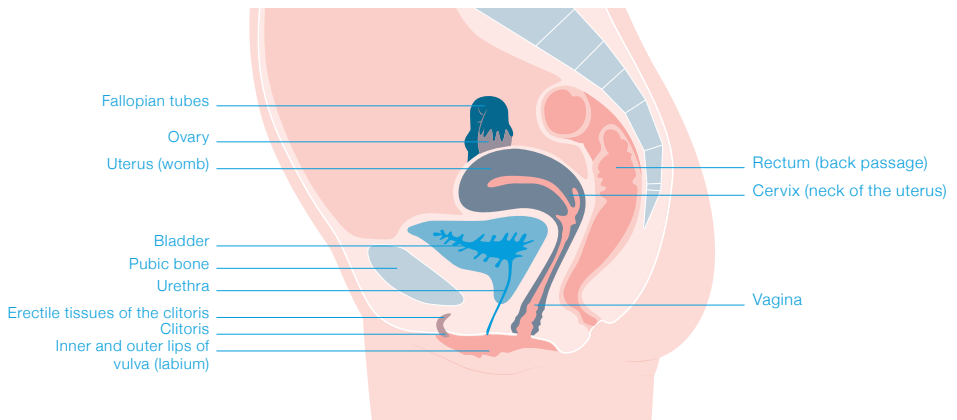
Sexual difficulties, such as premature ejaculation, lack of orgasm, vaginal dryness or diminished sex drive, can arise at any time. These difficulties may be physical and/or psychological in origin. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate the physical from the emotional. It is good if you can talk to your partner about your feelings. It may also help to talk with your doctor or a specialist in sexual health.

# FEMALE SEXUAL ORGANS

A distinction is made between internal and external sexual organs. The external sexual organs are called the vulva. The internal sexual organs of women include the vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.

## VULVA

The vulva consists of the two labia majora and the two labia minora which surround the urinary opening and the entrance to the vagina. At the top of the vulva is the clitoris which contains erectile tissue. The clitoris can play an important role in sexual pleasure for a woman. If a woman has been excised (genital cutting), the vulva may look different (also see pages 4/5).



### VAGINA

The vagina is elastic and is about 7 to 10 cm in length. The shape and length of the vagina does not affect the quality of sex. When a woman is sexually aroused, her vagina moistens. Menstrual bleeding (period, menstruation) passes from the uterus to the outside through the vagina. The vagina cleans itself by means of natural secretions (vaginal flora) which maintain a natural balance. Additional vaginal washing is not recommended.

### UTERUS (WOMB)

The uterus is located in the lower abdomen. It is the size and shape of a pear and consists mainly of muscle tissue. In pregnancy, the foetus grows inside the uterus. The narrow part of the uterus which extends into the vagina is called the cervix. Menstrual blood flows through the cervix and, if a woman has sexual intercourse with a man, sperm passes through the cervix into the uterus. When a woman gives birth, her cervix opens and the vagina stretches allowing the baby to pass through it.

### OVARIES

A woman has two ovaries. They lie on either side of the uterus and have two functions. They produce female hormones (oestrogen and progesterone) and each month, under hormonal influence, a female egg develops to full maturity in either one of the ovaries. During ovulation, this mature egg is released into the fallopian tube. Ovulation takes place about 14 days before the next menstrual bleed.

Ovulation does not always occur at the same time each month. For this reason estimating the infertile days of a menstrual cycle using calendar calculations is not a reliable way to prevent a pregnancy.

### FALLOPIAN TUBES

The fallopian tubes allow the egg to pass from the ovary into the uterus. Fertilisation of the egg by a sperm takes place in the fallopian tube. A woman is considered pregnant once the fertilised egg implants in the lining of the uterus.



#### MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Every month, under the influence of female hormones, the mucous lining of the uterus (endometrium) thickens. At the end of each cycle, if the woman does not become pregnant, the endometrium breaks down and is shed as a period (menstrual bleed). The period consists of blood and some of the mucous lining. If a pregnancy has occurred the endometrium builds up further and serves as a kind of 'nest' for the embryo.

The first menstrual bleeding usually occurs between the age of 11 and 15. The length of one menstrual cycle is the number of days between the first day of one period and the first day of the next period. The length of this cycle varies greatly, but is generally between 21 and 35 days. Sanitary towels or tampons can be used to collect menstrual blood. During menstruation, women can participate in sport, swim, shower and have sex if they wish. During your period if you feel unwell, have abdominal pain or a headache, then applying heat, doing exercise or taking a herbal remedy may help. Taking hormonal contraception, such as the pill, can also help with menstrual symptoms.

Before the menopause (the last menstrual period that a woman has during her lifetime), menstrual bleeding may become irregular before it stops completely. The hormonal changes during the menopause can lead to unpleasant symptoms for some women.

#### HYMEN

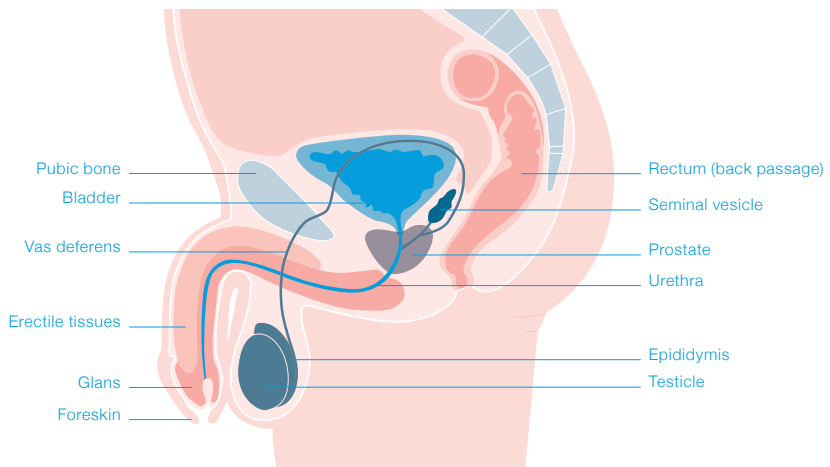
The hymen is a membrane around the edge of the vaginal opening. It looks different in every girl and every woman. It has an opening through which menstrual blood can flow and through which it is usually possible to insert a tampon during menstruation. It may bleed slightly the first time a woman has sexual intercourse. For many women, however, this is not the case.

Even if you feel healthy, regular check-ups by a gynaecologist are recommended, in particular for breast cancer and cervical cancer screening.



# MALE SEXUAL ORGANS

The external sexual organs in men are the penis and the scrotum, which contains the testicles. The internal sexual organs consist of the prostate, the urethra, the vas deferens and the seminal vesicles.



## PENIS

The penis consists of erectile tissues, which fill with blood and swell up either upon sexual arousal or spontaneously. The penis becomes erect and becomes larger and stiff (erection). The length and thickness of each man's penis is different and these factors do not affect the quality of sex. The glans is located on the tip of the penis. It can play an important role in sexual pleasure. The glans is covered by a foreskin. Some men are circumcised. This means that the foreskin has been completely or partially removed.

Inside the penis is the urethra, through which urine flows out. When the penis is stiff (erection), men cannot urinate. During an erection the passage of urine is prevented, so that the semen can flow through the urethra to the outside.

### TESTICLES

The testicles have two functions. They produce male hormones (androgens, testosterone) and, from puberty until death, they produce sperm continuously. The sperm are conducted into the penis through the two vas deferens, via the prostate.

### SEMEN

Semen (sperm or ejaculate) consists of sperm and fluid from the prostate and the seminal vesicles. On ejaculation, the semen spurts out of the penis. Even before ejaculation, transparent drops containing sperm may come out of the erect penis.

Even if you feel healthy, regular medical check-ups are recommended (starting from 40 to 50 years of age), in particular for prostate cancer screening.

# CONTRACEPTION

Use of a reliable and appropriate method of contraception is the best way of preventing an unwanted pregnancy. A range of different methods exist – some reliable, some less so.

The different methods of contraception may produce some side effects. They do not, however, cause sterility. Most need to be prescribed by a doctor. Seek advice on the advantages and disadvantages as well as the reliability of the various methods. Contraceptive advice at sexual health centres is confidential and usually free.

It is you that decides which method of contraception to use. Choose a method that is adapted to your health, your circumstances and your current needs. These needs may change over the course of your life. Ideally, discuss the choice of contraception with your partner.

It is possible to become pregnant very soon after a contraceptive method is discontinued or if it is used incorrectly.

In Switzerland you need to pay for contraception; if necessary some sexual health centres can assist you financially.

The only contraception that also protects you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is the condom. There are male condoms and female condoms.

On the following pages you will find an overview of the methods of contraception available in Switzerland.



## CONDOMS

### Male condoms

The condom is a thin sheath of latex (rubber) that prevents direct contact between the penis and the vagina or the penis and the anus. It protects against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. There are various models and sizes (see [www.mysize.ch](http://www.mysize.ch)). We recommend condoms bearing the 'OK' quality seal or the CE marking. Condoms can only be used once. If the condom or its packaging is no longer intact or if the condom has passed its expiry date, it must not be used.

Condoms can be used in combination with lubricants. These are sold alongside condoms. Oils or creams can damage a condom and will not provide sufficient protection.

People who are allergic to latex can buy condoms made of other materials.

Condoms are inexpensive and available from sexual health centres, chemists or drug stores, supermarkets, vending machines and via the Internet.



### Female condoms

Female condoms are made of a thin, soft synthetic material. Prior to sexual intercourse, the condom is inserted into the vagina, so that it covers the vaginal walls. It protects against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Female condoms can only be used once. They are available from some sexual health centres and via the Internet, for example from the shop at [www.sante-sexuelle.ch](http://www.sante-sexuelle.ch).



### COMBINED HORMONAL CONTRACEPTION (OESTROGEN, PROGESTOGEN)

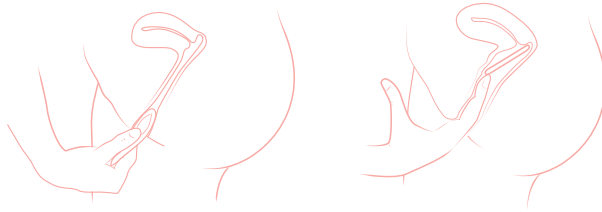
This type of contraception combines two hormones, oestrogen and progestogen. These hormones prevent ovulation, alter the uterine lining and also thicken the cervical mucus which acts as a barrier to the sperm and prevents it from reaching the uterus. Typically, this type of contraception is used for three weeks, followed by a one-week break. Bleeding occurs during this break, similar to menstruation. Protection against pregnancy continues during this 7-day break but you must start a new pill pack on the correct day for this to be guaranteed. These methods are prescribed by a doctor.

### Pill (combined oral contraceptive pill)

The pill must be taken every day at about the same time. The hormones are absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract. Most pill packs contain 21 pills (or 22 or 24). Once the pack is finished, a 7-day (or 6- or 4-day) break follows. Start the next pack after the pill-free days, even if you are still bleeding.

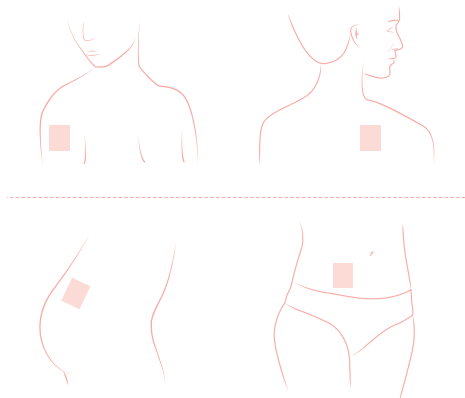
### Vaginal ring

This flexible ring (54 mm in diameter) is inserted by the woman into the vagina and removed after three weeks. The hormones are absorbed through the mucous lining of the vagina. After the 7-day break start with a new ring, even if you are still bleeding. Always insert and remove the ring on the same day of the week and at the same time.



### Transdermal patch

A new patch is applied to the skin each week for three weeks. The hormones are absorbed through the skin. After using the patch for three weeks no patch is worn for one week. After this break start with a new patch, even if you are still bleeding. Always apply and remove the patch on the same day of the week and at the same time.



### PROGESTOGEN-ONLY CONTRACEPTION

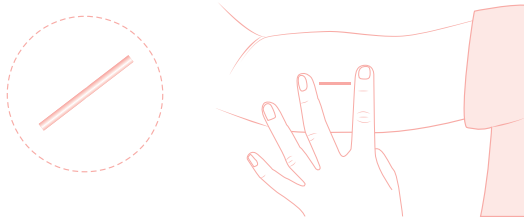
This type of contraception only contains a progestogen hormone. Progestogens prevent the build-up of the uterine lining (endometrium) and thicken the cervical mucus which acts as a barrier to the sperm and prevents it from reaching the uterus. They can alter the bleeding pattern and, while these methods are used, bleeding may be absent altogether or become irregular. A doctor's prescription is needed.

#### Progestogen-only pill

This pill is taken every day at about the same time, without interruption. When you have finished a pill pack start a new one straight away, without taking a break.

#### Contraceptive implant

This is a flexible rod made of plastic that is four centimetres long and two millimetres in diameter. Under local anaesthetic, the doctor inserts it under the skin on the inside of the upper arm. This method protects against pregnancy for three years.



#### Quarterly injection

This type of contraception is injected into the muscle in your buttocks every three months. There is also a similar method which is injected into the skin of the abdomen or the thigh. These injections are given by a doctor or trained personnel. Compared to other types of contraception, a woman may take longer to become pregnant after stopping the injection.

### INTRAUTERINE DEVICES (IUDs, COILS)

An IUD is about three centimetres long and is fitted inside the uterus by a doctor. This is usually done during menstruation. The IUD can be easily removed using threads that protrude out of the cervix into the vagina. Depending on the model, IUDs may be left in the uterus between three and five years, some for as long as ten years. There are two main types of IUDs, those that contain hormone and those that are made of copper. They act locally inside the uterus.

#### Copper IUDs

These prevent a pregnancy through the action of the copper on the lining of the uterus and on the sperm. They can increase and prolong menstrual bleeding.



#### Hormonal IUDs

These contain a progestogen hormone. This prevents pregnancy by suppressing the build-up of the lining of the uterus and causing the mucus in the cervix to thicken. Bleeding may be absent altogether, lighter or become irregular while the progestogen IUD is in the uterus.



## OTHER METHODS

### Diaphragm

A diaphragm or vaginal pessary is a soft, dome-shaped membrane made of rubber or silicone with a reinforced rim. They come in various sizes. The woman inserts the diaphragm into her vagina before sexual intercourse. When properly positioned, the diaphragm covers the cervix. This prevents sperm from reaching the uterus. The diaphragm is used together with a spermicide (cream or gel that renders the sperm immobile).

To determine the right size and learn to use the diaphragm correctly, a consultation with a doctor, midwife or other suitably trained professional is required. The diaphragm is available – on order – at chemists. Diaphragms can be reused for two to three years.



There are also cervical caps which are placed directly on the cervix. They work in a similar way to the diaphragm.

### Fertility awareness method

This method is based on a woman's own observation and interpretation of the indicators of fertility during her menstrual cycle. By combining a number of different indicators the reliability of this method increases. It includes recording body temperature, observing changes in cervical mucus as well as monitoring the consistency and position of the cervix. This information is also useful in identifying the fertile phase when a pregnancy is desired. During a woman's fertile period, the couple may choose to use a different method of contraception or refrain from sexual intercourse entirely.

High motivation levels on the part of both partners as well as advice and training by an expert increase the reliability of this method. For more information contact a sexual health centre or a midwife.

#### UNRELIABLE METHODS

The following methods should not be used if pregnancy is not desired or is not advised. They are not reliable enough:

- the rhythm method, also called the standard days or calendar-based method;
- coitus interruptus, also known as ‘being careful’ or the ‘withdrawal’ method;
- spermicides (except in combination with a diaphragm or condom);
- vaginal douching, also called vaginal washing.

#### MALE AND FEMALE STERILISATION

Sterilisation is the only permanent method of contraception. Sterilisation is suitable for people who do not wish to have any children in the future. It is not covered by health insurance.

##### Female sterilisation

In female sterilisation (tubal ligation) both of the fallopian tubes are blocked by surgical intervention. Therefore, fertilisation of the egg is no longer possible. The woman’s sexual life, hormone production and menstrual cycle remain unchanged.

##### Male sterilisation

In male sterilisation (vasectomy), both vas deferens are severed by means of a small surgical procedure. After about three months, sperm are no longer found in the semen (ejaculate). The man’s sexual life, hormone production and ability to have an erection or ejaculate are not affected.

### EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Emergency contraception can be taken to prevent a pregnancy after unprotected or inadequately protected sexual intercourse. It should be considered particularly in cases of problems with a condom, forgetting to take the pill or sexual violence. There are different methods of emergency contraception available in Switzerland. The quicker you react, the greater your chance of avoiding an unwanted pregnancy. Emergency contraception is most effective when used within the first 24 hours.

#### Hormonal emergency contraception

Available over the counter at all chemists, at many sexual health centres and from doctors. Depending on the active ingredient, it should be taken within no more than 72 hours or 120 hours after unprotected intercourse.

#### Intrauterine device (IUD) as emergency contraception

A copper IUD is fitted by a doctor no later than 120 hours after the unprotected sexual intercourse.

# SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are transmitted primarily through unprotected sexual contact, for example, during vaginal, anal or oral sex or if sex toys are shared. Some STIs can also be transmitted by direct contact with mucous membranes or by skin-to-skin contact. Some can be transmitted in other ways as well, for example from a mother to her child during pregnancy, during childbirth or through breastfeeding. Transmission is also possible when syringes, needles or snorting devices are shared during drug use. Other parts of the body can be affected by these infections as well as the sexual organs.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is also transmitted sexually. HIV is most commonly transmitted during penetrative sex when no condom is used. But transmission can also occur during pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and when syringes are shared for intravenous drug use. HIV weakens the immune system and prevents it from being able to defend itself against infections and other diseases. After a period of years (often without symptoms) certain types of diseases can develop. This stage of an HIV infection is called AIDS. There is no cure yet for HIV. Medication can prevent progression of the disease but it has to be taken for life.

STIs are caused by different pathogens such as

- bacteria: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, gardnerella, syphilis;
- viruses: HIV (AIDS), HPV (human papilloma virus), herpes, hepatitis A, B and C;
- fungi and parasites.

When detected early most infections are treatable. Untreated STIs can have serious consequences, such as infertility and cancer. Having an untreated infection means that there is a greater risk of becoming infected with HIV.

### PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

The best protection against HIV infection and other STIs is to practise safer sex, which means:

- use a condom (either a male or female condom) for all penetrative sex (vaginal or anal sex);
- avoid getting sperm or menstrual blood into your mouth, and do not swallow any sperm or blood;
- should you experience any flu-like symptoms or any itching, burning or discharge after sex without a condom, see a doctor immediately.

Vaccinations against hepatitis A and B are available, as well as against some types of the HPV virus. The hepatitis B virus is highly contagious. Vaccination provides effective protection and is strongly recommended both for boys and girls at the end of their schooling. It can, however, be given at any age. The HPV vaccination is recommended for all girls aged 11 to 14 (protection against cervical cancer), but can also be done later. Since 2015 this vaccination has also been recommended for boys and young men from 11 to 26 years of age.

### SYMPTOMS OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

It is possible to be infected with HIV or have another STI but have no symptoms. An infection can be contagious even when no symptoms are present.

If you have any of the following symptoms, find out whether a sexually transmitted infection is the cause:

- unusual discharge or unusual bleeding from the vagina, urethra or from the anus;
- burning, itching or pain in the genital or anal areas or in the urethra;
- ulcers, blisters, skin changes in the genital or anal areas, or on/in the mouth;
- swelling of the lymph nodes in the groin area;
- flu symptoms after unprotected sexual contact.



When someone has become infected with HIV, the virus reproduces rapidly during the initial period. This can lead to flu-like symptoms (such as fever, enlarged lymph nodes and severe fatigue). This is called the primary infection. During this period, there is a very high risk of transmission. However, this phase can occur without symptoms.

#### TESTS AND TREATMENTS

If you either suspect or have any signs of an infection, contact a doctor or an advice centre rapidly. They will decide what tests and treatments are necessary. It is strongly recommended that you follow this advice. Protect your partners from becoming infected. Talk to them about it! It is a good idea to be tested and treated together.

Get tested if you have put yourself at risk, even if you have no symptoms of infection. The type of tests (urine, blood or swabs) carried out will depend on what infection is suspected.

A risk evaluation and addresses of where you can have STI testing can be found at [www.lovelife.ch](http://www.lovelife.ch). You can also obtain information from your doctor, or at a sexual health centre.

#### HIV TEST (AIDS TEST)

An HIV test can detect infection once three months have elapsed since exposure to possible HIV infection. Testing can be done anonymously. An HIV test can only be carried out with your permission.

#### EMERGENCY HIV TREATMENT WITHIN 48 HOURS (PEP)

This treatment can significantly reduce the risk of becoming infected with HIV. The treatment is recommended if, for example, you have had unprotected sexual contact with a person who is, or may be, HIV positive as well as after incidents involving sexual violence. Seek advice quickly at your local hospital.

# PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

## PREGNANCY TEST

If you think you are pregnant and your period is late, do a pregnancy test. The test detects pregnancy hormones in your urine. You can have a pregnancy test done by your doctor and at many sexual health centres. The test is also available at chemists, drug stores, supermarkets and from vending machines.

## DURING PREGNANCY

If you are pregnant or are planning a pregnancy a sexual health centre will answer any legal questions you may have as well as questions concerning work, insurance, health, finances, relationship issues, etc. Your concerns will be dealt with confidentially and these services are free of charge.

Regular check-ups by a gynaecologist or midwife are recommended when you are pregnant. A midwife will answer any questions about pregnancy, childbirth, the postpartum period, breastfeeding, nutrition and childcare. Midwives also do house visits.

You can attend an antenatal course either alone or with your partner.

## PRENATAL EXAMINATIONS

During the pregnancy you will be offered prenatal testing (antenatal screening). These tests are aimed at detecting deformities and disorders in the foetus. They include ultrasound examination as well as other examinations and blood tests. Doctors are required to inform you about the procedures before any prenatal testing is performed. It is your decision which of these tests will be done. Consult your doctor about any questions you have. A sexual health centre can advise and assist you with your decision and in particular with any difficult situation that may arise.

## INFERTILITY

If you are having difficulty becoming pregnant, you can seek medical assistance. Before beginning treatment, clarify what costs are covered by health insurance and what treatments you will have to pay for yourself.

### CHILDBIRTH

Childbirth can take place in a hospital, at a birthing centre or at home with a midwife. In Switzerland, most children are born vaginally. A caesarean section may be planned or need to be carried out in an emergency. If there are no medical reasons to the contrary, you can choose where and how your baby will be born. Ask your health insurance company about costs covered if the birth is to take place in a different canton.

Before giving birth you can decide who will accompany you at the delivery. This may be your partner, a family member or a friend. Regardless of whether you are alone or accompanied, you will be provided with support and assistance by experienced midwives during the birth.

### AFTER CHILDBIRTH

#### Breastfeeding

A midwife or lactation consultant can help you with your decision on whether or not to breastfeed and with any other questions concerning breastfeeding. Advice is also available from the childcare and parent advisory services. Some hospitals have an emergency number for breastfeeding women.

#### Sexuality and your partner

Having a baby is an emotional experience. It takes time for a woman to recover from giving birth. The child's needs are priority, resulting in less time for you and your partner. Sexual needs may change. Talk to your partner about this.

If there are no medical reasons to the contrary, penetrative sex is possible when sexual desire returns and when any stitches that you had during the delivery or from a caesarean section are almost completely healed.

#### CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS WHILE BREASTFEEDING

- Male and female condoms
- Progestogen-only contraception (such as the progestogen-only pill, the contraceptive hormonal implant or a quarterly injection)
- IUDs (from six weeks after birth)
- Diaphragm (from three months after birth)

#### Contraception

If you do not wish to become pregnant again immediately, it is important to choose an appropriate method of contraception that you can use after giving birth. A woman

can ovulate and become pregnant even before her menstrual bleeds have returned, and also while breastfeeding. You can discuss this at the postnatal check-up.

#### Postnatal depression

Depression may occur after giving birth due to exhaustion and lack of sleep. If this happens, it is important to ask for help and to seek professional advice and support. Your partner may also show symptoms of exhaustion. Your doctor, childcare and parent advisory services or sexual health centres can offer help and support during this difficult time.

#### HEALTH INSURANCE

When you are pregnant, health insurance covers all costs for check-ups by a doctor or midwife as well as the costs for the birth and postnatal check-up. You are entitled to postpartum visits by a midwife until 56 days after the delivery as well as up to three breastfeeding consultations while you are breastfeeding.

#### MATERNITY LEAVE AND MATERNITY ALLOWANCE

After giving birth, women are entitled to maternity leave and a maternity allowance for a period of 14 weeks. They must, however, have paid AVS insurance for at least nine months prior to giving birth to be entitled to these benefits. The allowance is 80% of their salary.

#### MATERNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

In some cantons, benefits are paid to eligible parents after a baby is born. Enquire about this at a social services office in your canton, or at a sexual health centre.

# ABORTION (TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY)

If you are pregnant and cannot or do not want to continue the pregnancy, contact your doctor or a sexual health centre without delay. Trained personnel will provide you with support, information and a listening ear.

## METHODS

Pregnancies can be terminated by taking medication or by a surgical intervention. The choice of method depends on the pregnant woman's wishes, at what stage the pregnancy is and on any pre-existing diseases or risks the woman may have.

Abortion is a medical procedure covered by one's health insurance.

It is possible to become pregnant again immediately after an abortion. To avoid pregnancy it is important to use an effective method of contraception which suits you.

## SWISS LEGISLATION

Under Swiss legislation a woman can end (abort) a pregnancy at any time during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. This is calculated from the first day of the last menstrual period. The decision lies with the woman, even if she is under 16 years of age. Abortion after the twelfth week of pregnancy is legal if the physical or mental health of the woman is endangered. The responsibility of assessing this risk and the decision lies with a doctor.

Young women under 16 must attend specialist counselling. In most cantons this is at a sexual health centre and/or the Child and Psychiatric Service.

#### INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

In the event of an unplanned pregnancy you are entitled to a free and confidential consultation. Someone you can trust can accompany you, if you wish. The sexual health and family planning centres (that are recognised by the cantons) are there to inform, assist and advise you. Consultations are also possible at short notice. You will have the opportunity to discuss your situation with a counsellor, to talk about your feelings, doubts and needs, regardless of your final decision and to do so as often as you wish.

- You will receive guidance with the steps necessary to obtain an abortion or to continue with the pregnancy and, if you choose, to release the child for adoption.
- You will obtain information about having an abortion as well as about private and public assistance if you decide to carry the pregnancy to full term.
- If you wish, you can take advantage of counselling, support and guidance after the abortion.
- You can get advice about different methods of contraception and about prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

## LEGAL NOTICE

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