

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation
Ending Homophobia, Empowering People www.lgf.org.uk
Reg. Charity No. 1070/04

A guide to sex and sexual health for women who have sex with women

Introduction

Welcome to 'Beating About The Bush', The Lesbian & Gay Foundation's little guide to sex and sexual health for women who have sex with women.

This booklet has been fully updated and refreshed for its third edition and is hopefully more practical and relevant than ever. Above all, we hope it is fun; sex should be enjoyable! With this sense of fun in mind, we've themed each chapter around a well-known song – we hope you're humming along as you read.

When we first launched 'Beating About The Bush' back in 2008, we did so because lesbian and bisexual women told us they find it hard to get information about sex that was relevant to them. Since then, this booklet has become the most popular resource we produce, with over 10,000 copies distributed in the last six years.

Although lesbian and bisexual women are increasingly visible, sadly it is still difficult for us to find relevant information on sex and sexual health. Most of us are never taught anything about sex between women at school or college and even those who should be able to advise us, like members of the medical profession, are often unsure.

According to the World Health Organisation good sexual health is "a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity." We've tried to reflect this broad definition in the contents of this booklet, offering information on a variety of issues related to sex and sexual health. Above all, we've tried to celebrate female sexuality and the all-around awesomeness of woman-on-woman sex!

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation, August 2014

Inside

- Getting To Know You
 - Turn Me On
 - Let's Get Physical
 - 22 Love Hurts
 - Don't You Want Me, Baby?
 - Under The Influence
 - Where Have All The Good Women Gone?
 - Tell Me More

Getting to know YOU

So what's down there?

The external appearance of your genitals is as unique as your face – everyone is different! However, we generally don't see people's genitals as often as we see their faces, and the media and porn industries tend to present only one version of what women's bits look like. In reality, the inner lips (labia minora) may be small or large, they may be tucked inside the outer lips or they may be more visible. Many women have one lip bigger than the other. The clit may stick out proudly or be hidden under the clitoral hood (and this may change as you get turned on). All these variations, and many more, are normal and part of your unique beautiful self.

Not all women will have the genitalia depicted here. Some trans women will have genitalia which is biologically male, whilst other women may be survivors of FGM (female genital mutilation) or have had surgery for a medical condition.

The best way to get to know your own genitals is to get a mirror and spend some time exploring, but hopefully this will give you an idea of what you're looking at...





As you can see from the sonogram image, the clitoris is much bigger than the part which is commonly labelled as such on most anatomical diagrams. The body of the clitoris extends in a Y shape around the vagina and back towards the anus.

The clitoris is full of nerve endings and is essentially an organ of pleasure. Understanding how it is shaped may help you understand how your body responds to sexual stimulation. By exploring the whole of your genitals, not just the head of the clitoris, you may discover new areas of pleasure.

Masturbation

66 Wanking, cracking one off, frigging, flicking your bean, diddling, solo sex, petting the kitty, self-pleasure... ??

Whilst it's not always talked about, masturbation is very common and certainly not something to be ashamed of. Touching yourself is relaxing and pleasurable and can even boost your self-esteem. Your body is yours to enjoy, as often as you like.

Many women masturbate from a young age and have selfpleasure as a regular part of their routine! Other women pleasure themselves less often and some women have never masturbated.

Some women avoid self-pleasuring because they feel shame around it, or can become frustrated if they are unable to orgasm. Learning to slow down, focussing on the sensations in your body and letting go of the 'goal' of orgasm will make the whole experience a delicious one, will heighten your capacity for pleasure and may change the way you relate sexually.

Whether you're masturbating for the first time or exploring how to expand your pleasure, it's worth setting aside some 'me time', free of interruption, so you can fully relax into the experience.

Some top tips for masturbation:

- Relax Taking a hot bath may be a great way to awaken your body. Try adding coconut oil to the water, stroke your body and enjoy the sensation of slippery oily water on your skin. Or just lie down, take some deep breaths and get comfortable.
- Get in the mood Maybe read some erotica, watch some porn or just fantasise about someone or something that turns you on.
- Think of your whole body as your pleasure zone Try touching yourself all over before heading for your genitals. Your skin is a very sensitive organ, stroking your whole body can arouse you in a deeper way than just touching your clit or vagina.
- ➡ Experiment with different types of touch on your genitals
 Stroke the outer lips and inner lips and circle your vagina. Each
 of these areas may like a different touch, take your time and
 savour each sensation. Touching around or gently inside your
 anus can be great too, just make sure you wash hands or sex
 toys before moving on to other areas.
- Explore your clit Try circling your clit with the pads of your fingers, or building pleasure with a side-to-side motion. For some women direct stimulation is too intense, if so explore around the clit to the sides or just above.
- Make it smooth Using lube or coconut oil can reduce friction and increase pleasure (steer clear of non-natural oils like baby oil, though).
- ◆ Go inside You may want to feel something inside your vagina. If so, try using one or two fingers or a sex toy. Notice what you feel like inside, the ridges and smooth parts. Your G Spot is on the front wall of your vagina – you may be able to find it if you curve your fingers towards yourself in a beckoning motion.

Think about breathing - Some women find that tensing muscles or holding their breath can help them build towards an orgasm, but this can also 'hold' the orgasm in the genitals. If you can breathe deeply and relax you may find the pleasure spreading through your whole body.

It's not all about the orgasm - Having an orgasm is great but don't focus all your pleasure on achieving orgasm or put pressure on yourself to do so. Pleasure is a wave which naturally increases and decreases. By focusing solely on having an orgasm you miss the enjoyment of the journey!

If after really getting to know your body you're concerned about not being able to orgasm, it's worth getting checked out by your GP or sexual health (GUM) clinic to see if there are any contributing physical factors.

Turn Meon

When it comes to sex, knowing what turns you on (and off) can have a significant impact on your overall experience. Understanding both your body and mind is the first step to a satisfying sex life. Become your own expert and you'll be able to share invaluable information with your chosen partner(s).

Women get turned on by different things and very often what might be a turn on for one is a complete turn off for another. So how do we avoid awkward or uncomfortable moments during an intimate situation? By talking about what you like and dislike - in other words, communication.



conversations of this nature. You may think your partner will find your turn-ons bizarre, weird or even disgusting. Rest assured, you will most definitely not be unique in your thoughts and chances are many people share your turn-ons. If you don't share you will never find out and you could miss out on a very pleasurable experience! However, also remember that some turn-ons are purely fantasies and not something you'd want to experience in real life, and that's perfectly normal.

Stimulating the Senses



Each one of our senses can be stimulated in many ways and finding out just what arouses each sense can take you on a pleasurable journey of sensual discovery.

Perhaps you find a specific fragrance particularly arousing or the feeling of another woman's skin on your fingertips excites you. Some women find the use of food in role play a great turn on, or you might prefer to be visually stimulated by a sensual strip tease.

Try to experiment with each one of your senses, use your creativity to discover what you enjoy and are comfortable with. Inevitably, you will also find out what you dislike, it's all part of the process of getting to know yourself better.

Role Play

Role play is often one of the turn-ons most talked about, but how far do we take our fantasies when we are acting them out with our lover(s)?

Some women will adopt masculinised personas when role playing and often use sex toys and items of clothing as part of the fantasy. Some fantasies may involve the role people will have during an intimate situation: some women fantasise about being submissive whilst others get aroused by being more dominant.

With sexual role play, the key to success is to be very clear on the expectations of each person involved and to make sure that all parties are comfortable and have consented.

Porn and erotica

Watching or reading about women getting down and dirty can be a huge turn on. It can also help you work out what gets you and your partner(s) going and it's a perfect way to get inspiration to put into practice.

True or False? When it comes to what turns you on, us ladies tend to be less visual than men.

False! Research has found that women are just as likely to be turned on by visual stimuli as men are.

Many women enjoy the visual stimulation experienced from watching porn. Whilst some people dislike porn, it is more commonplace now than ever before, and this is reflected in the diversity that you can find in shops or online.



The list of porn and erotica genres is endless: soft, hard, straight, queer, feminist, indie, veg, etc - you are spoilt for choice. Your best bet to find the right kind of porn for you or one you can identify with is to check out different companies (some produce womencentred porn) or research the unlimited options of the internet.

Erotic literature is also widely available via the internet or from LGB&T bookshops and there is a broad range of erotica written specifically for lesbian and bisexual women. Watching porn or reading a dirty bedtime story with your partner can be a great way of getting in the mood. If you're feeling creative you could even film your own movie or write your own story, starring yourselves!

Let's Physical

All about sex

We ♥ sex! Sex is a great tonic - it improves your wellbeing, reduces stress levels and could even make you healthier: one study found that having sex once or twice a week could boost your immune system! In this section we're exploring a little of the ins and outs of sex between women.

What exactly constitutes sex is a subject that's up for constant debate, and obviously everyone has their own definition of what sex is for them. For the purposes of this booklet, we're defining sex as some kind of genital contact and/or something that you do to try to give or receive sexual pleasure.

At this point, it's worth us pointing out that we are mostly talking about sex with biologically female genitals here, but we know that many women who have sex with women will also have sex with men, whilst some trans women will have biologically male genitals. See our'Love Hurts' safer sex chapter on page 22 for top tips on safer sex with a penis.

Before we get down to specifics, we want to make it clear that whether you do any, none or all of the activities mentioned is entirely up to you. Sex should always be consensual, and enthusiastically so – you shouldn't feel physically or emotionally coerced into doing something you don't feel comfortable with and neither should your partner(s).

Communication

When we spoke to women about what makes good sex, almost all of them mentioned communication. But talking about sex can be awkward. There are still taboos around women's sexual desires and you've probably never had lessons on how to articulate what works for you!

Some people assume that one woman will instinctively know how to get another woman off. But physical and psychological differences mean that this just isn't true – something that worked wonders for you or which drove your last partner wild might well leave your current partner cold.

We're not necessarily saying that you need to draw up a list of all the things you want and don't want to do sexually (although this can be a fun activity, especially if you're doing it with a partner) but letting the person you're sleeping with know what works for you, and taking the time to find out what works for her, can only improve your sex life. You

13

don't have to start off with a long debate, for most people brief instructions during sex like 'softer/harder', 'down a bit', 'just there' or 'don't stop!' work pretty well. But if there are things you really do or don't like doing or parts of you that you really don't want to be touched it can be useful to make this clear before it starts getting too steamy. Talking about safer sex is also important; see our 'Love Hurts' chapter on page 22 for more information.

Foreplay

Whilst it's sometimes fun to get down and dirty straight away, most people enjoy a bit of foreplay before getting into genital contact.

Kissing is almost always a good place to start and can be really sensual and stimulating – many times a short goodnight kiss turns into something more once tongues get involved! Once you've locked lips, kissing, licking and nibbling elsewhere on her body will likely get both of you in the mood. Everyone has their own erogenous zones (areas of the body that they like to have stimulated), such as neck, earlobes or toes. Many women will like to have their breasts stroked or massaged. Nipples can be a big turnon – some women will reach orgasm

just from having their nipples sucked, nibbled or pinched. But others won't want their nipples touched at all and this can vary due to the time of the month – lots of women find that their nipples and breasts get more sensitive around their period and touch can be painful rather than pleasurable. As with everything, it's usually best to start off gentle and get a little more physical once it's obvious she's enjoying it.

Clit stimulation

Where would we be without the clitoris? Well, presumably somewhat frustrated! This amazing organ contains more nerve endings than any other part of the human body and is probably largely responsible for sexual pleasure. The small 'button' that we usually refer to as 'the clit' is actually the clitoral 'glans' or head, the body of the clitoris extends into the body and in a Y shape around the vagina and back towards the anus - see the diagram on page 4 for more info.

For the purposes of this information, we're referring to the part of the clitoris that you can see and that can be most readily stimulated. You can stimulate your partner's clit with fingers, sex toy (some mini toys are made purely for clitoral stimulation) or your tongue. Certain women find direct stimulation of their clit too intense and prefer to be touched through clothes or just to have the area around their clit stroked.

If you're touching her with your fingers or a sex toy, you'll probably find she enjoys it more with a little lubrication. You may find she's wet enough from vaginal fluid but if not, a little lube will help.

Just as described in the section on masturbation, don't focus all your attention solely on the clit. Take your time and explore her whole genital area. Different women like different things when it comes to stimulation, with some preferring consistent side-to-side or circular motions and others liking something less predictable.



You may be able to tell what your partner likes by her reaction – both physical, verbal and emotional responses. As a woman gets more turned on her clit fills with blood so you may feel it swelling under your touch. Hopefully you will also be able to talk to each other about what does (and doesn't) work.

Oral sex

'Going down' is possibly the sexual behaviour most linked to sex between women, and it can be pretty awesome (if we do say so ourselves). However, it can also be pretty anxiety-inducing – both on the part of the giver and the receiver. This can especially be the case before you have sex for the first time and or when you're having sex with a new partner. Some women worry about the way they smell or taste or about whether they will know what to do when they're giving oral sex.

Worries about smell and taste are generally unfounded as long as you wash regularly. The vagina is self-cleansing so there's no need to wash inside. In fact, this can cause irritation.

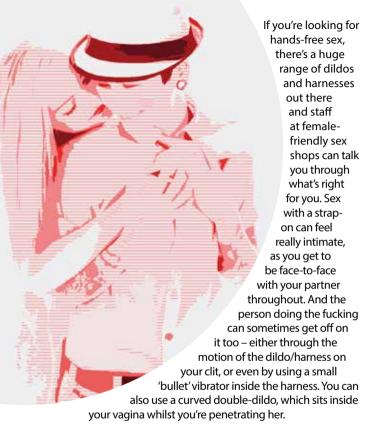
The trick to good oral sex (as with all good sex) is to experiment and react to what works for her! It isn't all about tongue on clit - use your whole month to explore all around her lips (labia), vagina and clit. Some women like to be penetrated (with fingers or a sex toy) or have their breasts played with at the same time as receiving oral sex. Don't worry if you don't seem to be hitting the spot right away, try different patterns of licking and sucking and you'll eventually find one that works for her.

'Sixty-nine' (both of you giving and receiving oral at the same time) can be even more intense, though it may take a little while for you and your partner to find a rhythm that works for both of you.

Penetration

Whilst many women love vaginal penetration, some women hate it, so see what works for you. And if you can come from penetration alone – lucky you! Research shows that most women require some kind of clitoral stimulation alongside vaginal penetration in order to orgasm.

The key for good penetration is usually to start small and work upwards. Try starting with one or two fingers or a small dildo and lots of lovely lube. Penetration feels good because it stimulates the G-spot on the front wall of the vagina; curling your fingers towards you in a beckoning motion once you're inside her can help with this, as can specially shaped sex toys. As with clit stimulation, there are different strokes for different folks when it comes to penetration. Some women like an 'in-out' thrusting motion, whilst others prefer circling motions or even just the feeling of being penetrated without movement. Experiment to find out what works for you and your partner(s).



'Fisting', or inserting your whole hand into your partner's vagina, may at first sound scary but for some women it's a really intense and pleasurable experience. Fisting is a bit of a misleading term, as you certainly shouldn't try to jam your clenched fist into your partner! Fisting requires trust and good communication.

Your fingers should be straight and as close together as

Lovely lube!

Lube is your friend – it can help make you or your partner feel more turned on and make it less likely that you'll accidentally injure yourself during sex. There are generally two different types of lube: silicone or water-based. Water-based lube is safe to use with dental dams, condoms and latex gloves, as well as with sex toys. Silicone based lube tends to stay slippery for longer and is safe to use with latex but using silicone lube with silicone sex toys may damage them. Flavoured lubes are also available and can be fun but be careful – some of them contain sugar which can trigger thrush in some women. Never use oil-based lubricants (such as baby oil or Vaseline) as these can break down latex in condoms and dams and also may leave a coating on your bits, possible and then which can lead to infections.

slowly inserted into which can lead to infections. your partner, one by one as she requests it. Make sure you use lots of lube! Once your hand is inside her, you may want to gradually clench it into a fist. The smallest movement of your hand may feel huge to her, so take it slow and steady and be prepared to stop if she wants you to.

Anal sex

Anal sex is still sometimes seen as taboo, but many women enjoy it: in one survey of women who have sex with women, over half of respondents reported having anal sex. Anal sex can involve penetration (with finger, hand or sex toy) or rimming (oral sex on the anus). Some women report that their orgasms are more intense if a finger or sex toy is in their back passage as they come.

All the advice for vaginal penetration applies for anal penetration too, but even more so. Start off small and slow and use lots of

lube. Lube is particularly important for anal sex as, unlike the vagina, the anus doesn't provide natural lubrication. Also be careful that any toys you use have a large base so they can't accidentally get inserted too far. And make sure that you don't transfer toys or fingers between anus and vagina without cleaning them thoroughly first.

Rimming can feel good, as there are lots of nerve endings around the anus and (as with anal penetration) the feeling of doing something taboo can be a big turn-on. But make sure the anal area is completely clean before you start as otherwise you can catch some nasty bugs – use a dental dam if you want to be sure.

Scissoring

Scissoring, or rubbing together your genital areas, is a bit of a Marmite sexual activity. Some people love it whilst others insist that there's no way it works. Whether or not this is something you like

probably depends somewhat on your and your partner's flexibility and anatomy! If you want to try scissoring, sit facing each other with your legs apart. You may then be able to hook one lea over your partner's thigh and the other leg under her other thigh and gradually move your vulvas together. Getting the right angle will probably take some practice! Once you're close together you can balance by holding onto each other and/or bracing yourself against the bed or a wall and move against each other.



As with all sex, safety and consent are paramount but these are particularly important with an activity where you may not be able to physically remove yourself from the situation. Make sure you have a safe word or movement (if you're going to be unable to speak) that will make your partner(s) aware that you're uncomfortable and want to stop. For more information on BDSM, check out the 'Tell Me More' section at the back of this booklet.

And finally...

Remember, whatever you do (or don't do) in bed, sex should be fun and enthusiastically consented to. There are no hard and fast rules, so do what feels good, talk to your partner about what turns you both on, enjoy exploring and stay safe.

Love Hurts

Safer sex

We really hope that love (or sex) doesn't hurt, but sadly there are risks with any kind of sexual contact. However, there are precautions you can take to protect yourself and your partner(s).

Sex between women is sometimes seen as low risk, as you won't accidentally get pregnant and may be less like to catch HIV and some other STIs (sexually transmitted infections). However, there is still a risk of STI transmission at any point at which bodily fluids, including vaginal fluid, blood (including menstrual blood), breast milk and anal mucous, are passed between partners. Some STIs can also be passed through skin to skin contact. Activities such as kissing, hugging, breast stimulation, massage and masturbation are generally very low risk. Using a barrier (such as a dental dam, latex glove or condom) can help minimise the risk of bodily fluids being transferred.

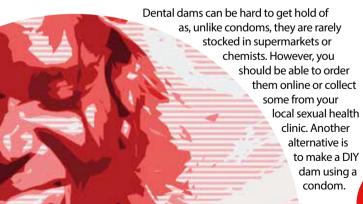
STIs have a wide range of symptoms, including itchiness, redness, soreness, bumps and discharge but sometimes the symptoms are easy to miss or not there at all. If you're sexually active you should have regular check-ups at your GP (if they offer sexual health testing), at your local sexual health clinic or at The Orange Clinic in West London (a specialist sexual health clinic for women who have sex with women). If you're in Manchester, The Lesbian & Gay Foundation can arrange STI testing for you through a local LGB&T-friendly GP. It's really important that you talk to your partner or partners about sexual health

and about sexual health testing. Ideally, you and your partner should both get tested at the start of a new relationship.

Safer oral sex

Oral sex is generally seen as 'low risk' as it is rare for HIV and some other STIs to be transmitted in this way. However, some STIs such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia, herpes and HPV can be passed on through oral sex. And if you have any cuts or sores in or around your mouth there is an increased risk of HIV transmission. Going down on someone whilst they're on their period is also higher risk, as bloodborne infections such as HIV and hepatitis may be present.

A dental dam is a square of latex which can be placed over a person's genitals to act as a barrier during oral sex or rimming. Going down on someone using a dental dam can take a little getting used to but dams are often flavoured to make it a bit more pleasurable. Some people using dams report that they miss the natural wetness that occurs during oral sex. You can compensate for this by putting a little lube on your partner's genitals before covering them with the dam.





Any sexual activity which can lead to bleeding or cuts/breaks in the lining of the vagina or anus is of higher risk.

This can include fingering, fisting and also some BDSM activities. Minimise risk by using lots of lube, keeping fingernails short and by covering your hands with latex gloves – this is particularly important if you have cuts or sores on your hands. You could also use a femidom (or female condom) to provide a barrier in the vagina.

Safer sex with toys

Bacteria and other nasties can live on sex toys, so it's important that they're kept clean. You can buy special products for cleaning sex toys but hot water and anti-bacterial soap should do a good job. Some dildos can even be put in the dishwasher!

Covering your toy with a condom and changing this before using on a different person or different body area is a good way to prevent the exchange of bodily fluids. If you're using a harness with a strap-on make sure this is also kept clean – some harnesses are machinewashable whilst others can be cleaned with soap and water.

Safer sex with a penis

Many women who have sex with women will also have sex with men at some point. Some trans women will also have genitalia that is biologically male. If you're having sex with someone who has a penis, you need to consider contraception as well as preventing STI transmission.

Using a condom or femidom (female condom) is the best option, as this prevents sperm from entering your body, providing a barrier to STI transmission as well as reducing the risk of pregnancy. There are many other forms of contraception (such as the pill, contraceptive implants or injections, the coil/ IUD and the diaphragm) but these don't provide protection against STIs. If you're having sex with a man who also has sex with men you may be at increased risk of HIV transmission, as HIV is particularly prevalent amongst gay and bisexual men, so make sure you use protection and get tested.

Keeping healthy down there

Good personal hygiene is an important part of sexual health. You don't need to wash obsessively, but keeping your genital area clean by daily bathing is a good idea. Use only mild, unfragranced soap around your genitals and don't wash inside your vagina. The vagina is self-cleansing and washing or douching it can upset the natural balance, causing irritation.

Having a generally healthy lifestyle is a good route to having a healthy vagina: eating a balanced diet helps maintain natural internal balance whilst exercise such as running, walking, pilates or yoga strengthens your pelvic floor.

It's a good idea to pee after sex, especially penetrative sex, as this is your body's natural way of cleansing the urinary tract and can reduce your risk of getting cystitis.

Thrush and Bacterial Vaginosis

Thrush and Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) are not usually seen as sexually transmitted infections, as you can get them whether or not you've been sexually active. However, there is evidence that they can be transmitted sexually between women.

Thrush is a yeast infection that causes itching, irritation and swelling of the vagina and surrounding area, sometimes with a creamy white cottage cheese-like discharge. It is fairly common – many women will get thrush at some point during their lives. If you are susceptible to thrush you may want to avoid using flavoured lube or anything else that contains sugar (such as chocolate sauce or soft fruit) on your genitals, as this can cause a flare-up. Thrush is easily treated with over-the-counter remedies but consult a doctor if you have recurrent thrush.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a common yet poorly understood condition in which the balance of bacteria inside the

vagina becomes disrupted. BV does not cause any vaginal soreness or itching, but it often causes unusual vaginal discharge which has a strong fishy scent, is white or grey in colour and/or is thin and watery. BV appears to be more common amongst women who have sex with women. Some women who have BV have no symptoms. BV is easily treated with antibiotics.

If you are being treated for BV or thrush and you have a female partner ask if your partner should also receive treatment, as some doctors won't consider this.

Cervical screening

Cervical screen tests (or smear tests) are a simple way to check for abnormalities on your cervix which may lead to cervical cancer. If you're aged between 25 and 64 you should have regular cervical screening (generally once every 3 years up to the age of 49 and once every 5 years after that). In the past, some lesbian and bisexual women were told they did not need screening. This information was incorrect – HPV (the virus that can cause cervical cancer) is very common and is easily passed on through sexual activity, including sex between women. You can find out more about cervical screening at www.lgf.org.uk/screening or from our 'Are You Ready For Your Screen Test?' booklet.

For more information about STIs and sexual health see The LGF's 'Sex Education Guide', which can be obtained for free from The LGF or downloaded from our website www.lgf.org.uk

Don't you want me; baby?

When sex doesn't satisfy

Are you getting too much sex or not enough? Would you prefer to spend a longer time on foreplay or would you like a bit more intimacy? In any relationship, your sex life can be made up of highs and lows. Tiredness, stress, anxiety or simply not feeling in the mood can all be contributing factors towards not getting the sex you want or being unable to respond to the needs of your partner.

Of course, there's also absolutely nothing wrong with not having sex at all, or not having it frequently, if that's what you want and that's what you're happy with. But sexual problems can have a profound impact on your overall health and wellbeing, so



High and dry

For most women, there will be times when you're not getting wet enough down below. Some women can get wetter than others which is perfectly normal and does not necessarily indicate that they are not turned on or interested.

Vaginal dryness can also occur temporarily for all sorts of reasons, including nervousness, anxiety, a reaction to certain medications, variations in your monthly cycle or the changes your body goes through as you get older (post-menopausal women are particularly prone to this). It may also indicate that you need a little more foreplay before sex. There are plenty of lovely lubes out there to help with this, however if problems persist, consult your doctor.

Sex on fire

Women can sometimes experience pain during sex, especially during penetration. You may experience pain the first time you have penetrative sex, due to your hymen being stretched or broken.

Pain during penetration can also be caused by a lack of lubrication, an infection, Pelvic Pain Syndrome (often caused by stress) or vaginismus (where the muscles around the vagina tighten involuntarily whenever there is an attempt to penetrate it). Make sure you're always using lots of lube during sex and only attempting penetration when you're relaxed and ready.

If you are experiencing pain during penetration you should get this checked out by a doctor, as there may be an underlying medical problem. There may also be psychological reasons why you're experiencing discomfort during sex, which can be addressed by a good counsellor.

Let's talk about sex...

It may be obvious, but talking to your partner about your relationship and preferences in the bedroom is really important. If you're finding it hard to share your likes, dislikes and deepest, darkest fantasies with the person you're sleeping with then you probably won't be getting the full potential out of your relationship. Not only will sharing these intimate thoughts bring you closer together, but it can also be a massive turn on too! Communication is key - so how can you expect to get the sex you want if you keep your thoughts to yourself?



Lesbian Bed Death

Some women in long-term relationships report that sex becomes more infrequent, or stops happening altogether. There's even a term for this phenomenon: lesbian bed death (although in truth couples of all orientations experience it!)

So is there any reason that female same-sex couples may be more likely to stop having sex? Well, maybe. Combine two menstrual cycles and (eventually) two menopauses, or even one of each, and there's a lot of fluctuating hormones that could lead to sex drives dropping off. Aside from this, there is the universal factor of life getting in the way, and of disagreements and arguments impacting on sex lives.

Of course, some long-term couples have little or no sex and are entirely comfortable with that situation. But for other couples, either one or both partners is unhappy with the lack of sex. Regardless of the reason for the drought, the first task is to talk about it with no pressure, no judgment and no accusations.

Within the discussion you could talk about what you're both into, your turn-ons, turn-offs and your limits. Even if you've discussed this in the past, expectations and desires can change over time.

All being well, you may (re)discover mutual preferences for certain toys, positions, locations, outfits or even fetishes, and that common ground could begin to bridge the distance that "bed death" creates. Or you may remind each other of all the great sex you had in the early days of your relationship and decide to revisit some memories!

Whether 'lesbian bed death' is a myth or a reality, we all deserve a fulfilling sex life and a dearth of sex can spell the death of a relationship. So it's important to voice your feelings and be open about your sexual preferences.

Under the influence

Drink and drugs can make you feel relaxed and more confident but being drunk or high can also have an impact on our sex lives.

Many women report that sex under the influence can be great – it may enhance or help sustain arousal and can make you feel more confident or euphoric about the situation you're in. However, it an also have the opposite effect and doesn't come without considerable risks. It's important to understand these risks so that you can make informed decision and have the sex you want.

Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol could make you or your partner(s) unable to properly consent to sexual activity. You should not have sex with someone who is intoxicated or high to the point at which they cannot properly communicate or understand what is going on around them.

Sex and drugs

Most drugs and substances can affect hormones and the menstrual cycles can become disrupted and in some cases stop altogether. Fertility is also lowered by most recreational drugs. Drugs can often deplete motivation, replacing it with feelings of fatigue and concentration loss.

Amphetamines and cocaine stimulate sexual desire, but can impair orgasm, which can make sex frustrating! With regular use, desire may fade too. Marijuana can make people withdraw or become anxious and/or irritable, which can hinder your sexual experience.

When sex and drugs mix...

You could be pressured into having sex that you don't really want to have.

you could have trouble getting sexually aroused.

you might forget what happened.

you may be at a higher risk of contracting STIs.

Under the influence (most notably with cocaine) the vagina can become dry and will no longer lubricate naturally. People taking drugs run a risk of suffering damage to the vagina, so if you do have sex while taking drugs, be sure to use lube.

Taking drugs can jeopardise safety and leave you vulnerable. Being high can disrupt your thought processes, which can mean that you lack the ability to negotiate safer sex and can prevent you from keeping yourself safe altogether.

Lowered inhibitions and poorer judgement could put you at greater risk of attack. Some drugs can cause blackouts and comas, leaving you vulnerable to abuse and significant harm. If you do take drugs, try to do so in a safe place with people who you trust.





If you do take a drug:

- Tell your partner or friends what you have taken in case you run into difficulties.
- Be aware that mixing substances increases risk and can cause extreme changes to breathing, heart-rate, consciousness and in some cases death.
- If injecting drugs, do not share any injecting equipment with anyone as this will put you at risk of infections like HIV and hepatitis.

Sex and alcohol

Though many people find alcohol relaxing, excessive consumption does not make sex easier or more pleasurable. Women have a smaller proportion of body water to fat content than men. This means that we have less fluid available to dilute alcohol, making its effects stronger and more concentrated. We also appear to have lower levels of a stomach enzyme (AHD) which affects how quickly the body breaks down alcohol. This means that whatever we have drunk stays in the body for longer. Some women also find the effects of alcohol are stronger and last longer when they are ovulating or pre-menstrual.

Alcohol can affect your judgement. You might become more easily influenced when it comes to sex. You can make rash decisions, such as having unprotected sex, which can lead to higher risk of contracting STIs.

If you're drunk, you're less likely to be thinking clearly enough to talk to your partner about the kind of sex you would like to have. Alcohol can also be linked with other unwanted experiences such as choosing inappropriate partners or putting yourself in dangerous situations. It also has the potential to negatively



affect relationships by causing you to be less physically and emotionally sensitive.

Alcohol can have a more serious effect on our sexual experiences than we might think. As a nervous system depressant, alcohol can numb the nerve endings in genitalia and decrease feelings of sexual arousal and pleasure. Vaginal lubrication and the ability to orgasm can also be adversely affected by alcohol, potentially leading to painful and frustrating sexual experiences. Being able to please the other person may become more difficult when you're under the influence of alcohol.



Excessive consumption of alcohol during sex can therefore:

- Affect the ability to orgasm (and some women may not be able to orgasm at all)
- Affect the intensity of your orgasm
- Affect the overall satisfaction and pleasure

When mixing sex with alcohol...

There is nothing to say that we should never mix alcohol and sex, but being aware of its potential effects allows us to make more informed and sensible choices.

- Ask your friends or partner to watch out for you if you're drinking alcohol. You can watch out for them too if they're drinking.
- Always travel home safely. Don't drive if you've been drinking.
- Never leave drinks unattended or accept drinks from people you don't know.
- Make decisions when you're sober. Before you start drinking, talk to your partner(s) about your boundaries (what you do and don't want to do), so that you don't get carried away and regret it later.

Look after yourself!

If, through using alcohol or drugs, you temporarily lose capacity to choose whether to have sex or not you are <u>not</u> consenting. Remember, if someone tries to have sex with you and you don't want to, you always have the right to say no, whether you are under the influence of alcohol/drugs or not. The same goes for your partner(s).

If you're worried about something that has happened to you when you've been drunk or high, talk to someone about it. The Lesbian & Gay Foundation can help - if you require any advice or information regarding issues surrounding alcohol and drugs, referral into treatment, or to share your experiences of any treatment.

Where have all the good women gone?

How to meet women who like women

Well, it's the million dollar question and wouldn't we all like to know the answer?! While there's no definitive way to find a good woman, here are a few ideas to get you started...

Plug in baby

There are lots of websites for women wanting to chat to and date other women. Most will have a subscription fee but look out for free trials or offers. You can then make a profile of yourself, and search to view other women's profiles with similar interests. It's a great way to meet other women in your area, or even the other side of the world.

On many of these websites there will also be discussion forums and information on activities going on for lesbian and bisexual women in your area. Remember, don't reveal any information which could expose your identity (such as your real name and address) in a public forum and don't allow anyone to pressure you into revealing anything you're not comfortable with. If you decide to meet someone then make sure you do it in a public place and that someone knows where you're going and when to expect you back. Be aware that the hot girl messaging you back may well be a bloke – people aren't always who they say they are!

All together now

Joining a group is a great way to meet likeminded women and Manchester, in particular, offers a wide range of social, support and networking groups for all ages,

interests and backgrounds. The LGF hosts social and support groups, includina Carousel and Stepping Stones. There are also many others on offer, from sports aroups to dining groups and groups for younger or older women Most groups are eager to welcome new members - after all, they've been set up to help connect people. So if you're nervous about going along for the first time give them a call or email in advance and a volunteer will usually be there to welcome you and introduce you around. If

Call me

There are plenty of different types of phone apps out there to use for dating and finding other women, depending on whether you're seeking a hook-up, a date or something longer term. Obviously, whatever time you decide to invest in using these apps, be prepared that things might not turn out exactly as you want them to. If you're arranging to meet someone be clear on what you want and listen to what they're saying too – if she's saying she

you're not from Manchester then there's still plenty going on across the rest of the UK. For more information on groups local to you try

searching online or call The LGF on 0845 3 30 30 30.

just wants to meet up for a one night stand, it's probably not going to turn into a love and roses relationship.

And make sure you're following the same safety precautions that we mentioned in the 'Plug In Baby' section.

Get the party started

One way to meet other women is out on the gay 'scene'. If you live in or near Manchester then you're lucky as its home to the world famous Canal Street in the Gay Village, where there are lots of brilliant bars and clubs to visit. Manchester is also home to alternative or non-scene club nights, including some particularly for women

However, be aware that most gay venues do tend to be male dominated and also that it can be a little intimidating to go out on the scene on your own. So take a friend with you if you can and seek out venues which are specifically for women or have a more even gender balance. Also check out different venues, as you will find that some bars are popular with different types of women.

If you don't live near Manchester then just have a quick search on the internet for local highlights in your area, or if you don't have access to the web then just give us a call at

The LGF and we'll be happy to help you out.



Tell Me More

Sex, sexuality and sexual health are such broad topics, there's no way we could cover everything. So here are some links to further information and support. If you need any further information, advice or links to organisations in your area, The Lesbian & Gay Foundation's helpline is open 10am-10pm, 7 days a week on 0845 3 30 30 30 or check out www.lgf.org.uk/women or email www.lgf.org.uk/women or email

Weblinks

Autostraddle

www.autostraddle.com

Lifestyle website for women who love women, includes lots of articles on sex & relationships.

Bi Community News www.bicommunitynews.co.uk

Britain's biggest selling bisexual magazine.

Brenda

www.benderapp.com/Brenda

Location based app for lesbian, bi and curious women.

Broken Rainbow

www.brokenrainbow.org.uk

Provides support for victims and survivors of LGBT domestic abuse.

Dattch

www.dattch.com

Dating app for lesbian and bisexual women.

DIVA

www.divamag.co.uk

The UK's biggest lifestyle magazine for women who love women.

Gaydar Girls

www.gaydargirls.com

Dating website for women looking for women

Gingerbeer

www.gingerbeer.co.uk

Listings website for lesbian and bisexual women, with chatrooms and forums.

LesbianSTD.com

Website about sexual health for women who have sex with women, with lots of useful info and Q&A section.

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation

www.lgf.org.uk/heart-sex

Section on The LGF's website dedicated to sex and sexual health for women who have sex with women.

NHS Choices Sexual Health www.nhs.uk/livewell/sexualhealth Information from the NHS on sex and sexual health. Also allows you to search for your nearest sexual health clinic

Pink Sofa

www.pinksofa.com

Website connecting lesbian and bisexual women for love, friendship and community.

Pink Therapy www.pinktherapy.com

UK directory of therapists working with gender and sexual diversity clients, including therapists who offer counselling on psychosexual issues.

Transforum

www.transforum.org.uk

Website and group supporting trans people and their partners, family and friends.

Books & booklets

Sex Education

A Guide to Good Sexual Health for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual People

Free booklet produced by The LGF - available for download from www.lgf.org.uk or call 0845 3 30 30 30 to request a paper copy

Sex for one:

The Joy of Selfloving by Betty Dodson

An enlightening book, dedicated to taking the shame out of masturbation and teaching you to enjoy the pleasure of self-love.

The Whole Lesbian Sex Book A Passionate Guide For All Of Us

by Felice Newman
The first and most comprehensive lesbian

sex guide to offer information and encouragement for all women who desire women - lesbian, bisexual, butch, femme, androgynous and trans.

The Ethical Slut

A Practical Guide To Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures by Dossie Easton & Janet Hardy

The book discusses consensual nonmonogamy as a lifestyle, and provides practical guidance on how such long-term relationships work and are put into practice.

Transmen Sexual Health, HIV and Wellbeing, a guide for transmen

Transwomen Sexual Health, HIV and Wellbeing, a guide for transwomen

Free booklets produced by Terence Higgins Trust - available for download from www.tht.org.uk or call 0808 802 1221 to request a paper copy.

We believe in a fair and equal society where all lesbian, gay and bisexual people can achieve their full potential.

This guide is available in large print by calling **0845 3 30 30 30** or email **info@lgf.org.uk**



Published in August 2014. To be reviewed August 2016.

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation

Number 5, Richmond Street, Manchester. M1 3HF. **Tel:** 0845 3 30 30 30

Email: info@lgf.org.uk Web: www.lgf.org.uk

Reg. Company No. 3476576 Reg. Charity No. 1070904 Cover illustration by Angela Woosey. Selected photographs by Sarah Quinn.





LOTTERY FUNDED

