

Condoms: More than just a hassle

Safe Sex, the Ultimate Erotic Guide could very well offer a chance to expand sexual creativity at the same time re-affirming the desire to keep safe.

BY MICHAEL S. REED

When the conversation turns toward safe sex, I still hear people fussing about using condoms. It's a hassle, they complain. Condoms get in the way of the fun, they whine. They speak longingly of the days of frenzied, carefree and casual sex, days when condoms weren't a matter of life and death; days when nothing came between them and their partner but a little grease and a whole lot of shakin' goin' on. They seem, also, to have forgotten those days spent at the V.D. clinic — waiting as a number for their monthly allotment of penicillin to cure whatever little gremlin some trick had left behind.

But who wants to remember the unpleasant things? Instead, we concentrate on the pleasure we used to get by having what we must now call unsafe sex. This, unfortunately, will stand in the way of our ability to find whatever happiness we can in the face of a plague. It is a waste of our precious time.

Now is the time to begin considering all the possibilities to be found in safe sex. Sure, there are activities that are dangerous, potentially lethal and must be considered as such, but there are a myriad of opportunities for those who face life with some imagination and a desire for adventure. A book for those who are interested in such possibilities is *Safe Sex, the Ultimate Erotic Guide*, by John Preston and Glenn Swann, (Plume Books, New American Library; 1986). It offers several insights into what you *can* do safely.

Some of the possibilities the authors discuss are voyeur/exhibition games with your partner, phone sex, massage, wrestling, the how-to's of condom use, plus many other ideas. *Safe Sex, the Ultimate Erotic Guide* could very well offer you a chance to expand your sexual creativity at the same time it will re-affirm your desire to keep safe.

But, back to the issue of condoms. Although they seem like a hassle, they are merely a preventative habit — as innocuous as brushing your teeth or only being attracted to a certain kind of man.

There are many different kinds of condoms to choose from. You could well find yourself poring over the adequate selection in the pharmacy at Fred Meyer — trying to select between ribbed condoms (and, oh, wouldn't he just love that); the colored condoms (definitely a must for the man with a sense for the festive); natural skin condoms (the most expensive, but purported to be less of a hindrance to sensitivity); lubricated condoms (not quite lubed enough for what you're interested in, however, and they taste terrible); or condoms with a "special receptacle end" (for the more practical and sensible man).

Picking the brand and kind of condom is only part of the selection. Then you must choose how many. Condoms are sold in packets of three (for those who don't like to plan too far ahead), one dozen (to keep the bedside supply fully stocked), and three dozen (for the hopeful or the practical, depending on your perspective). Condoms will range in price, starting at just a

few dollars for a dozen Trojans to between ten and fifteen dollars for a dozen natural skin condoms.

You might find that selecting the kind of condom for you is the least of your hassles. There is, after all, the matter of introducing the little devils into sexplay, which must be done before *any* oral or anal activity.

There are men who still believe it's not necessary to use condoms unless you plan on ejaculating (which is a very foolish evasion of the issue and you should remember their names so you may find their hospital rooms more readily). This is not to say that ejaculation should be the primary goal in sexual activity — safe sex is far more interesting and more fun when the process is more important than the goal.

It is important to always insist on condoms. I have met people who tell me that since they and their lover of five months are monogamous that they really don't need them. It's very sweet *and* very stupid. There is no way of knowing who has been infected and who is spreading the disease. Monogamy is a perfectly viable option, but it does not exclude the necessity of safe sex and condoms. Even for men who have been faithful lovers for years, now is the time to re-learn your sexual behavior to include safe sex practices, especially with someone you can trust — after all, this is to be the way of life and living, literally, for a very long time to come. Someone once sneeringly told me (after we had got into bed) that he didn't "do condoms." I sneeringly replied "if you don't do condoms, then you don't do me." After he saw that I was serious, he put aside his prejudice and we managed to have a good time. Above all, don't be afraid to say no when someone tries to get you to do something that is sexually unsafe. The self-respect that comes from being sensible far outweighs the fleeting pleasure of unsafe sex and the

resulting fear of infection.

In order to relieve the awkwardness that can accompany the use of condoms, try making it an integral part of the sexplay. Rip the package open with your teeth. Growl at him as he lies there. Roll the condom over his cock. Slowly. (Make sure you lightly pinch the end of the condom so that no air gets trapped inside and there is room in it to hold his semen). Then tell him to put one on you. If he doesn't know how, show him — don't be shy about these things, giggle if you must, but we all have to help each other. Oh yes, and be sure not to use petroleum based lubricants with latex condoms. These lubes do not "give" as much as water based lubricants and are likely to cause the condom to break. And remember to hold onto the rolled end of the condom as you insert or withdraw from your partner to keep it from slipping off.

Using condoms may seem like a hassle, but not once you get used to it. It does very little good to wish they weren't necessary — Those negative thoughts will prevent your imagination from soaring. Safe sex offers a great opportunity to explore and discover erogenous zones instead of focusing mainly on the penis. And if you're one of those people who complain about the reduction in sensitivity because of the condoms, you might decide that you prefer a small reduction in sensitivity in comparison to the one-way ticket to the intensive care unit that surely accompanies unsafe sex.

Condoms will require communication and sharing between you and your partner — it tells your partner that you care enough about yourself to want to live, and even more important, it should tell him that you care enough to want him to stay alive, also. It is merely a simple matter of courtesy, and one that will surely help to bring an end to this epidemic.

ALCOHOL, DRUGS . . . AND AIDS

There is growing evidence of a significant connection between AIDS and alcohol and drug abuse.

Substance abuse is an issue we can no longer afford to ignore.

Drugs and alcohol don't cause AIDS. AIDS is caused by a virus. But there are at least three ways in which alcohol and drugs can increase your chances of getting AIDS.

First, alcohol and drugs depress the immune system and make you more susceptible to disease.

Alcohol, marijuana, speed, cocaine, poppers, and other recreational chemicals lower your resistance to disease. In some research studies, poppers have been implicated in increasing the risk of Kaposi's sarcoma, an opportunistic infection common among people with AIDS. Drugs and alcohol weaken your health. They increase stress rather than relieve it and help the AIDS virus overcome your body's defenses.

Second, alcohol and drugs reduce your ability to stick to judgements about what's safe and what isn't.

A majority of gay men in Portland have given up Unsafe Sex. For the relatively few who haven't yet, studies demonstrate a strong correlation between alcohol and drug use and Unsafe Sex.

Third, sharing IV drug needles transmits the AIDS virus directly from the bloodstream of one infected person to the bloodstream of another.

If you do take the risk of using IV drugs, don't share needles! It's a direct route for the transmission of AIDS. There are thousands of IV drug users in America with AIDS, and probably other thousands who are still incubating the virus and who are contagious. Don't share needles!

According to experts who treat substance abuse among gay men, we have had a major epidemic of substance abuse in our community

for years—so much so that most of us have accepted substance abuse as a routine part of gay life. What was once routine, however, is now deadly.

If you want confidential and gay-sensitive information about substance abuse for yourself or for a friend, help is available. Contact Phoenix Rising, 408 S.W. Second, Suite 412, 223-8299.

Remember:

- Sharing needles is dangerous. Don't share needles.
- Alcohol and drugs depress the immune system. Protect your health.
- Getting high can lead to Unsafe Sex and exposure (or re-exposure) to the AIDS virus.

Now is the perfect time to take a fresh look at your own use of alcohol and drugs—and to get some help (often free) to find out if you have a drinking or drug problem that may increase your chances of getting AIDS.



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