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Sexual health for trans people

Trans people have many ways to live out their sexuality in a satisfying, enriching way which is in keeping with their gender identity. Self-awareness, openness and communication are important for a happy and healthy sex life.

Counselling and
test centres



aids.ch

Trans identity

Gender is a multilayered topic with many different facets. In addition to biological sex characteristics, it also includes cultural and social aspects that we assign to genders. Every individual has their own gender identity and a unique way of expressing it.

When a person is born, we systematically assign them a binary gender based on their **genitalia**. In their lifetime, each person discovers their own individual gender identity.

At birth, trans people are assigned a gender which only partially or not at all corresponds to their **gender identity**. People whose gender identity aligns with the gender they are assigned at birth are “cis”.

Some trans people are women, some are men, and some are non-binary. Their gender identity does not fit exclusively into the binary categories of man or woman.

You can't tell a person's gender identity by looking at them.

The term “trans” refers solely to gender identity. A trans person can have any sexual orientation.

Being trans is great. Nevertheless, **discrimination and stigma** can negatively affect the sexuality and health of trans people.

Being trans is rewarding.

You can take time to discover and express your own gender identity and sexuality. No one has to adhere to stereotypically male or female categorisations. Find out what's right for you.

* Due to a lack of space, we use the term “trans” for binary trans people, non-binary people and gender diverse people.

Sexuality

Sexuality has many different aspects. It is entirely personal who people feel attracted to, who they fall in love with, who they have sex with, and which sexual practices they enjoy. Their body and gender identity also play a role in this.

Well-being

Sexuality is often portrayed in a very cis-heteronormative way. This can make it difficult for people to engage with their own sexuality, especially if their own gender identity or sexual orientation is rarely or poorly represented.

Gender roles

It's worth listening to your body and taking time to discover your sexuality. Maybe you like fulfilling a specific gender role at some times but not at others. Being trans can present a great opportunity to explore sexuality beyond binary or familiar gender roles and get to know yourself in the process.

Discover

Self-awareness, masturbation and others sharing their experiences in media such as podcasts and books can help you to work out your own preferences and explore your sexuality. The better you know yourself, the easier it is to tell your sexual partners what you like or want to try.

Sexual relationships

Sexual relationships give cis and trans people the opportunity to feel seen and valued in their own gender. How these relationships are structured is entirely up to the participants. It's important that sexual encounters feel right, even if they aren't always perfect.

If you don't want something or it causes you unwanted pain, you can say this at any time. It's always okay not to want something (anymore), even if you wanted it before. **Only yes means yes.**

If you want to try something new, ask your sexual partner, and accept their answer if they say no.

Whether and when you want to inform potential sexual partners that you are trans is entirely up to you. You can also assess your partner's attitude and degree of knowledge. When outing yourself, always put your safety and well-being first. You don't have to answer every question and can set a limit at any time.

Dysphoria

Not all trans people feel equally comfortable in their body. The term "gender dysphoria" describes the fact that some, but not all, trans people feel a severe sense of rejection or discomfort due to the gender assigned to them at birth.

On some days you will feel good in your body, on others not so much. It may also be that the dysphoria changes over time and, for example, becomes focused on another part of your body.

Some people do not have sex if they feel strong dysphoria and instead distract themselves in other ways. Other people find that having sex distracts them and helps them feel better in their body.

Many different regions of the body can stimulate arousal. Some trans people like to be touched in places which are not so strongly associated with their gender, such as the buttocks or face.

The important thing to understand is that a penis is not necessarily male and a vulva is not necessarily female.

Fetishisation

Trans people are often sexualised and objectified. Some people have a fetish for trans people. They have an extreme sexual focus on the transness of their sexual partners. It's up to you whether or how you want to interact with these people. Your safety always comes first, and you can always say no.

T4T

Some trans people prefer T4T, which stands for "trans for trans". You might sometimes see this abbreviation on hookup apps or dating platforms. It signals that someone only wants to have sex and/or be intimate with other trans people. T4T can be a great way to discover the sexual worlds of trans people.

Transition

The term “transition” refers to a phase in which some trans people take certain measures to feel more comfortable in their gender identity, gender expression, or body. Not all trans people undergo transition. This does not make someone more or less trans.

There are many temporary and longterm ways to express your gender identity and feel comfortable with it. Maybe you also like your body the way it is.

Find out what you need to feel comfortable in your body and gender in everyday life, as well as during sex. Learn from other trans people, or seek the advice of a professional.

Some trans people come out to their social group, change their name or gender marker, take hormones, or get surgery in order to feel more comfortable in their body and gender identity, while others don't. Every transition is different.

Temporary changes

Special underwear can be used to temporarily change the appearance of the upper body and genitals.



A **binder** (tight compression top) or special **trans tape** can make the chest look flatter.



A **bra** with or without **breast epithesis** can make breasts appear larger.



Tucking panties/gaffs are tight underpants with which the penis can be folded upwards to make it look flatter.



A **packer**, a penis epithesis, can be attached with a harness, special underwear or medical adhesives. There are also models that can be used as strap-ons or for urinating while standing.

Important

Always make sure that binders, panties or packers are the correct size and are used carefully. Do not wear this underwear for too long to prevent pain and injury.

Hormones

If you use hormones or hormone blockers, your genitals and sexual sensations may change. Their effect on sexuality is highly **individual** and **subjective**.

How and when hormones have an impact on the body depends on many different factors.

Some trans people notice changes in their well-being or their libido, depending on hormone levels. If you feel that something is wrong, contact your attending specialist.

It's important to attain adequate information and seek the guidance of a professional before starting hormone therapy.

Operations

Some trans people undergo surgery, while others do not. After surgery, the sexuality, feelings and preferences can change. Think about what you expect from the surgery. Make use of consultations and take the time to find suitable medical professionals you trust. This will also make it easier for you to follow their instructions. This is very important for a successful outcome.

It is not possible to describe every type of operation in this flyer. Contact an advisory service for more information.

Hormone therapy can cause the following changes to your genitals or sexuality:

Testosterone

- Reduced breast volume
- Clitoris growth
- Increased libido
- Vaginal dryness
- Thinner vaginal mucosa
- Loss of menstruation
- Changing vaginal flora

Oestrogen / testosterone blockers

- Breast growth
- Smaller penis and testicles
- Reduced fertility
- Reduced libido
- Less ejaculate and semen

For **intersex genitals**, the following applies: Tissue with cavernous bodies can grow with testosterone and become smaller with testosterone blockers and oestrogen.

Safer hormone use

If you inject hormones yourself, always use sterile equipment, only use it once, and don't share it with anyone. Liver and hormone levels also need to be checked regularly.

Protecting yourself against HIV

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system. With the right strategy, you can protect yourself against HIV during sex.

Condoms

Condoms provide protection if the penis or packer is large enough for them to fit well. Always use only one condom per orifice and change it in between. Condoms come in various sizes. Learn more at aids.ch/condom

In penetrative sexual intercourse, it is recommended to use a water-soluble or use silicon-based **lubricant**. This prevents tearing the condom from friction. Lubricant also helps to prevent small tears in the mucous membrane or pain during penetration with fingers or sex toys.

If the penis is smaller than the condom and thus able to slip out during sex, the condom offers no protection. In this case, PrEP can protect you.

PrEP

Taking preventive medication under medical supervision protects against HIV just as reliably as condoms. Learn more at aids.ch/prep

U=U

People with HIV who are undergoing effective treatment cannot transmit the virus – even during unprotected sex. Learn more at aids.ch/uu

Open communication and trust

If you and your partners test negative and are sexually exclusive, you cannot become infected with HIV This requires a high level of trust.

Act fast!

PEP emergency treatment for HIV is available after risk encounters, especially unprotected anal or vaginal sex. To be effective, the treatment must be provided within a matter of hours. Learn more at aids.ch/pep

Protecting against other STIs

Vaccination, protection, testing, treatment: that's our recommendation. To find the right strategies for you, visit aids.ch for more information and clinics.

Vaccination

Certain infections can only be prevented with vaccination. Infection can have serious consequences. That's why it's important to get vaccinated against **hepatitis A/B** and **HPV**. You may also be advised to get other vaccinations. Consult a specialist.

Protection

Unlike HIV, STIs such as syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia are transmitted through all sexual practices, for example

- through anal or vaginal sex, even when using a condom
- through oral sex
- via sex toys
- through mutual masturbation
- through kissing

Therefore, regular testing offers the best protection against most STIs, as STIs are often asymptomatic.

Testing

Trans people, just like anyone else, engage in a wide range of sexual practices, so there are no uniform testing recommendations. Seek the advice of a specialist at a sexual health center. Regular testing is especially recommended when starting a new relationship or if you have alternating sexual partners.

Treatment

Almost all STIs are easy to treat, and we now have effective treatments for HIV. Regular testing can also be used to identify and treat asymptomatic infections at an early stage. In this way, you also prevent transmission to sexual partners.

Good to know

If hormonal therapy causes the mucous membrane to become thinner, infections of the vagina or urinary tract occur more quickly through exposure to everyday bacteria. **Washing your hands** before sex prevents infections. **Urinating** after sex helps prevent urinary tract infections.

Condoms can also be applied to **sex toys**, which can be used when switching to a different orifice or sexual partner. Clean and disinfect sex toys thoroughly to prevent STIs from being transmitted.

Avoid contact between mucous membranes and **menstrual blood**. It transmits STIs and HIV particularly effectively.

Gender-responsive hormone therapies are not a **contraception method**. You can make use of all common contraceptives, including hormonal contraception. Contact a specialist. If there is a risk of an unwanted pregnancy, you have five days after the potential conception to take the "morning-after pill". It is most effective in the first 24 hours after having unprotected sex.

Some trans people want children. If you want children, contact a specialist. They can help you learn more **about your desire to have children** and your options in that regard.

Tips and tricks

If you are experiencing **erectile dysfunction**, a penis ring can help. When pulled over the penis, it optimises blood flow and helps to maintain an erection.

In the event of a severe **atrophy** (thinning of the tissues) of the vaginal mucosa, an oestrogen or testosterone ointment can deliver the necessary hormones to the tissue and strengthen it. Beyond that, these hormonal preparations have no influence on your hormone levels.

If you experience **pain** after vaginoplasty, physiotherapy can help alleviate this.

HIV information for trans people

Nowadays we have effective treatments for HIV. If you are a trans person living with HIV, all therapeutic options are open for you. If you have undergone successful treatment, you can't pass the virus on to others, not even through sex.

Take the opportunity to get checked by a healthcare professional during your **regular check-ups**. This will benefit your health. Enquire about the options available to you as well as the risks and side effects for you. This will help you find the best treatment for you. You can also switch to a different medical professional at any time if you don't feel comfortable. You can find a list of recommended practices and clinics at aids.ch

There hasn't been much research into how HIV medications affect hormone therapies administered to trans people. Some medications affect **hormonal balance**. Your doctor can check this and, if necessary, adjust your medication so that it no longer interferes with your hormone therapy.

Your HIV status does not affect **surgical transition measures**.

Societal expectations for different genders can influence how you deal with your HIV infection. You can disregard these expectations. For example, it's okay for a man to seek help.

You're not alone!



Visit positive-life.ch for more information about living with HIV, plus stories, topics and support services.

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