



# TOP 10 ANAL HEALTH TIPS

A Reference Guide for Non-clinical Providers in the field of HIV care and prevention services.



## LET'S TALK ANAL HEALTH

Initiate the conversation about anal health with clients by using one of the following opening questions :

“When was your last anal pap smear?”

“Share with me your use of condoms?”

“Share with me your practices around anal sex.”

“What questions do you have about anal health?”



## DISCUSSING ANAL HEALTH WITH CLIENTS

This reference guide was developed to help providers discuss anal health tips with women, men and transgender persons in non-clinical health care settings. The following anal health tips can be discussed with all clients, regardless of sexual orientation, to address anal health concerns.

**The top 10 anal health tips to discuss with clients to address anal health concerns and reduce the risk of HIV and STD transmission through anal sex.**

### 1. Avoid straining when having a bowel movement.

Straining can lead to new or worsening hemorrhoids and forcing dry stool may cause fissure. If you can't move your bowels, get up and try again later.

### 2: Try not to over-clean following a bowel movement.

We all want to be as clean as possible, but aggressive wiping can lead to trauma. Instead use a moist towelette to remove the bulk of the stool, then dry your anus using toilet paper in a blotting method to remove remaining remnants. Be careful to watch for allergy to certain wipes.

### 3. Increase Fiber.

Adding more soluble and insoluble fiber to your diet will keep your digestive tract moving and stools soft and easy to pass. Fiber supplements are particularly useful when diet alone is not enough.

### 4. Stay Hydrated.

Drink as much water as possible to avoid constipation and dry, hard stools. Your body will not send water to the bowel if it is needed elsewhere. Also remember that without water, fiber supplements are unable to activate.

### 5. Get fully screened for STIs.

STI screening is an important part of general health. Make sure your medical provider is screening all areas of the body where you might be exposed- such as your rectum if you're having receptive anal sex, or your throat if you're having oral sex. Urine testing and blood work will not identify all STIs.



## CONVERSATION TIPS

Three tips that will help providers discuss anal health with clients in a confident and comfortable manner.

1. Use brochures and other materials to support the information provided during counseling.
2. Always relate the conversation back to anal health and prevention of STIs.
3. Ask the clients as many open-ended questions as possible.

### 6. Get an anal pap smear.

An anal pap smear (or anal cytology) is an important part of general health screening and can identify changes related to Human Papillomavirus (HPV) that may lead to the development of anal cancer in some patients. It is the best way to screen for anal cancer in both men and women.

### 7. Use condoms for anal sex.

Whether you are the insertive or receptive partner there are many sexually-transmitted and other infections that can be transmitted through unprotected sex. For best protections the insertive partner should wear a male latex condom from start to finish. Female condoms may be worn by the receptive partner as an alternative if use of a male condom is not possible.

### 8. Use water-based lubricant for anal sex.

Water based and silicone lubricants are popular choices for anal sex, though silicone can be difficult to remove. Water-based lubricants are safe, effective and easy to clean up after. Never use oil-based lubricant such as Vaseline® or lotions as these may compromise the integrity of condoms. Saliva is ineffective at reducing friction and may spread infection.

### 9. Get to know your body.

If you're interested in having receptive anal sex, practice makes perfect. Learning to relax your internal sphincter will help avoid unnecessary pain and discomfort. Practice introducing small toys into your anus in a step-wise approach over several weeks. Try this alone or with your partner as part of foreplay. Over time, you will graduate to a size that will allow receptive anal sex to feel comfortable (even pleasurable!).

### 10. Don't ignore problems.

People are often embarrassed or ashamed when talking about their anus. Although you may feel this way, don't ignore symptoms like growths, pain, bleeding or discharge, as these are never normal. Seek an evaluation with a medical provider immediately. Most anorectal issues are treatable. And remember- we *all* have an anus so there is nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about!

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