

How to have anal sex



FAST FACTS

- Many people enjoy anal sex – straight, gay and bisexual.
- Having unprotected anal sex puts you at higher risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than other sex acts. Using a condom correctly protects you and your partner.
- The anus is not self-lubricating, so you need to use lots of lubricant. Only use water-based lubricants that are specially designed for sex, oil-based lubricants can cause condoms to break.
- If you move on to oral or vaginal sex straight after anal sex use a new condom to avoid cross infection.
- Where it is available, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) can be taken to prevent HIV infection.

Anal sex is any type of sexual activity that involves the anal area. Whether you are thinking of having anal sex for the first time, or you just want more information on how to stay safe and enjoy it, this page will help answer your questions.

What is anal sex?

People usually think of anal sex as when a man's penis enters the anus, but it also includes using fingers or sex toys in the anus, or licking the anus ('rimming'). You can read more about oral-anal sex on our ['How to have oral sex'](#) page.

Anyone can enjoy anal sex, whether they are a man, woman, gay, bisexual or straight, and whether they are giving or receiving it. Although many gay men enjoy it, some prefer not to have penetrative anal sex. It is up to you to decide what you want to experiment with and to find out what you enjoy.

How do you have anal sex?

When you first explore the anal area it can feel strange, so before you begin make sure you and your partner have talked about it and are both happy to try it out. If you find you don't like it, explain to your partner that anal sex isn't for you.

If you decide to have penetrative anal sex, start slowly with touching and caressing to get used to the idea and make sure you are relaxed. This is important because there is a muscle in the anus (the sphincter) that needs to be relaxed to allow penetration to be comfortable. If you are giving anal sex, use plenty of lubricant and start by penetrating just a little and then pulling out completely. When your partner is ready, penetrate a bit further and then pull out again. Continue with this until you are fully in. Make sure you listen to your partner and understand how they feel - be prepared to stop at any time if they are uncomfortable or in pain.

Anal sex can feel stimulating and pleasurable for both the person giving and receiving - but it can also take a while to get used to how it feels. If it doesn't go perfectly the first time you can always try again when you're both in the mood. Remember that you can pause or stop whenever you want. Just because you have started something doesn't mean you need to continue.

How do I stimulate a man's prostate gland?

Many men have nerve endings in their prostate as well as their anus, and they often enjoy having these stimulated. The prostate is between the bladder and the penis and can be stimulated with a finger or sex toy in the anus. However, there are lots of blood vessels in and around the prostate and it can get bruised if handled roughly, so treat it gently and use lots of lube.

Is anal sex painful?

For many people anal sex is a pleasurable part of their sex life. However, whether you are a man or a woman, penetrative anal sex can be uncomfortable or even painful if rushed, especially if it's your first time.

Luckily, there are things you can do to reduce any pain. These include making sure you are relaxed, going slowly, using lots of water-based lubrication and working your way up to penetration with the penis with smaller objects such as fingers or sex toys.

Continual communication is the best way to make sure you both enjoy anal sex. If at any time you feel it is too uncomfortable or painful then you should stop immediately.

Anal sex, HIV and STI

Having anal sex increases your risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including [chlamydia](#), [genital herpes](#), [genital warts](#), [gonorrhoea](#) and [syphilis](#). However, there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your partner.

The lining of the anus is thin and tears easily, which makes it more vulnerable to infection. So, if you are the receptive partner (often called the 'bottom') you have a higher risk of STIs and HIV from unprotected anal sex than many other types of sex.

Whether you are a man or woman, straight, bisexual or gay, follow this advice to reduce the risk for both you and your partner:

Use protection - You can use either an [external \(male\) condom](#) (which goes on the penis) or an [internal condom](#) (also called a female condom) which is inserted into the anus before sex, just as it would be used in the vagina. Some people feel safer using extra-thick condoms for anal sex. You should also put condoms on any sex toys you are using, making sure you change them between partners. Dental dams are a good form of protection for rimming.

Taking [pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#) is another way to prevent HIV infection, but it may not be available everywhere.

Infections or bacteria can be passed from the anus to the vagina or the mouth so be careful when switching between different types of sex. Always wash your fingers, penis or sex toys when you move from one area to another and make sure you use a new condom.

Love lube - Unlike the vagina, the anus doesn't produce its own lubrication, so it's important to use a good lube to make sex more comfortable and to prevent damage to the anus.

Don't use your partner's semen (cum) as a lubricant. Always use a water-based lube which is specially designed for sex. Oil-based lubricants (such as baby oil and Vaseline) can weaken condoms and make them more likely to break.

Clean gently - Some people clean their anus before anal sex because they want to be sure there is no faeces (poo). If you decide to do this, only use water or a mild soap and be very gentle, otherwise you might damage, tear or scratch the anus putting you at greater risk of STIs.

Consider PrEP - Taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is one way to prevent HIV infection. If you think you are at high risk of HIV it may be a good option for you to consider but remember it only protects against HIV not other STIs.

Seek help - If you've had unprotected anal sex and are worried about possible HIV infection, go and see a healthcare professional straight away. You may be able to take [post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\)](#) to prevent HIV infection, but it has to be taken within 72 hours for it to work. Remember PEP is not a replacement for condoms and isn't available everywhere.

Get tested - You can protect yourselves and others best if you know your status. Have regular tests for HIV and other STIs so that you can get the treatment you need and take precautions to protect others. Remember that if you are living with HIV and on anti-HIV medication then the level of HIV in your blood can become undetectable making it impossible for you to pass on the virus.

Stay in control - Avoid excessive alcohol or drug consumption as they can stop you from feeling pain, or make you take risks you wouldn't normally take.

Pregnancy -Technically, it's not possible to get pregnant from anal sex as there's no way for semen to get from inside the anus to the vagina, but there is a small chance of semen leaking out and dripping into the vagina after anal sex. Using [condoms](#) is the best way to make sure you are always protected

properly against [STIs](#) and pregnancy.

Should I have anal sex?

As with any type of sex, it's important that both people want to have anal sex and that no one feels pressured or forced into doing anything they don't want to do.

Talk to your partner about protection before you start having anal sex. Remember that having unprotected anal sex puts you and your partner at higher risk of HIV and other STIs than other sexual activities. Being safe will help you both feel more relaxed and make sex more enjoyable.

Deciding whether to have anal sex is a very personal thing. The main things to consider are whether it feels right, and whether you and your partner are both sure. Our article '[Am I ready for sex?](#)' will help you think about this.

HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to date information.

We provide all this for FREE, but it takes time and money to keep Avert.org going.

[Can you support us and protect our future?](#)

Every contribution helps, no matter how small.

[PLEASE DONATE NOW](#)

©iStock.com/nico_blue. Photos are used for illustrative purposes. They do not imply any health status or behaviour on the part of the people in the photo.

Last full review:

31 March 2020

Next full review:

31 March 2023



Sources:

[NHS 'Is sex painful the first time?'](#)

[NHS 'Does anal sex have any health risks?'](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) 'Anal Sex and HIV Risk'](#)

[Brook 'Anal Sex'](#)

[Healthline 'Anal Sex Safety: Everything You Need to Know'](#)

