



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

Respect @ La Trobe

Volume 1: September 2025

THE HOOK UP

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REALLY MEAN?**

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WHY PLEASURE AND CARE ARE THE KEY TO GOOD SEX (P. 10)



THE LINE

THELINE.ORG.AU

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SEX, DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS.
(BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)**

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BARRIER SAFE SEX ITEM SAMPLES*



Condoms

A thin latex or rubber tube that is rolled down to cover the penis or an object like a dildo or toy before sex. Prevents pregnancy in vaginal sex (at a 98% success rate), and infection spread in all types of sex. Condoms are cheap and available at the supermarket or chemist.



Lubricant (sachet)

Water based gel that can be used with other barrier contraceptive devices to make sex more slippery – it can prevent pain from penetrative sex (vaginal or anal), generally making sex feel more pleasurable. You can get lubricant from supermarkets and chemists.



Dental dam

A thin sheet of latex (or rubber) that can be used during oral sex between the mouth and genitals to prevent the transmission of infections. Dental dams are harder to find than other products, and are usually purchased online.

Not going to use one or more of these products? Don't let them go to waste! Pass them on to someone who will (or just have a play around with them, we're not gonna stop you)

*Only available if you got this booklet as a part of the Sexual Health Month activation 2025

Word **FOREPLAY FROM RESPECT @ LA TROBE**

Having safe, honest conversations about sexual and reproductive health is empowering and provides an opportunity for people to explore options for managing their wellbeing.

The Respect @ La Trobe team want to start the conversation – so here we are! This magazine is a no-nonsense, easy-to-read booklet with info about some of the things that you might be wondering about.

We encourage you to seek spaces and people where you can continue these conversations – with your partners, friends, family, or local services to support your sexual and reproductive health.

Do you have questions about this publication? Email respect@latrobe.edu.au

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AT LA TROBE

La Trobe University provides some sexual and reproductive health resources, and we are always working to make it easier for our community members to manage their health.

TRAINING (ONLINE MODULES)

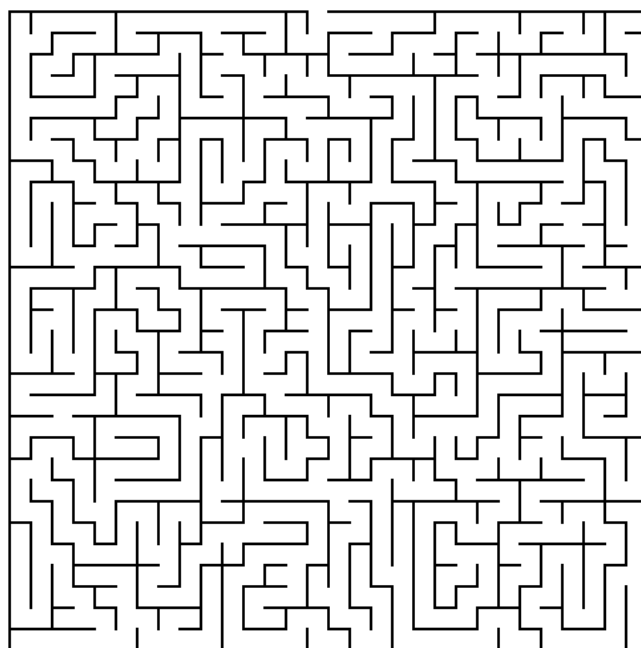
Respectful Behaviour and Culture (RPC8010)

Dating in Australia: Sexual and Reproductive Health for International Students (DIN-SHV)

ON EVERY CAMPUS:

- Chest/breastfeeding rooms
- Menstrual products in some bathrooms (provided by Share the Dignity on Bundoora and Bendigo campuses)
- Condoms and other contraceptives in select spaces

A-MAZE-ING: HELP THE UNI STUDENTS FIND GOOD QUALITY INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



(this magazine)

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We want to know your thoughts about this publication – good, bad or otherwise. Did we answer questions you had? Did we miss anything? Did you enjoy picking up and reading this magazine? Fill out the survey at the QR code.





WHAT IS “SAFE SEX”?

MANY PEOPLE WHO RECEIVED SEX EDUCATION ARE TOLD THROUGHOUT THEIR ADOLESCENCE ONLY ENGAGE IN SEX IF IT'S SAFE. LET'S EXPLORE ALL THE WAYS YOU CAN ENGAGE IN SAFE (AND SEXY) SEX - AND IT ISN'T ONLY CONDOMS!

FIRST... WHAT IS SEX?

Maybe you think you know what sex is, but there might be more sex options than you think ... and that can't be a bad thing, right?

In fact, there is no specific definition of what is and what is not sex. Especially when we're referring to “safe” sex, we're talking about more than just one action.

“Penis in vagina” (also called penetrative sex) is probably the sex you learned about in high school (if you learned about sex in high school at all), but the good news is that sex can include a whole lot more:

- oral sex (use of the mouth to stimulate genitals)
- anal sex (penetration of the anus, generally with a penis, but perhaps with an object like a dildo)
- hand-stuff (digital stimulation) – use of the hands/fingers to stimulate genitals or other sensitive parts of the body
- genital-on-genital sex – sometimes penis in vagina, but can also include other combinations
- use of (safe) toys
- anything else that feels like a demonstration of intimacy might be sex

Usually when we are talking about safe sex, we're talking about a few different things:

- Protection from the spread of infections (sometimes called Sexually Transmitted Infections, or STIs)
- Psychological and physical safety
- Prevention of pregnancy

DO IT SAFELY

PREVENTING INFECTION

Type of sex: all types

Methods of safety: barrier contraception (like condoms or dental dams), use of lubricant to prevent small tears in skin forming, general hygiene (like handwashing and showering regularly).

Aftercare: You can access STI tests from your GP, and it's a good idea to be tested regularly – and remind your partner/s to test too! If you have or think you have an infection, see your GP.

Final note: being honest with partners about any infections or symptoms you experience is one of the best ways to prevent spread.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY

Type of sex: all types

Methods of safety: check in about what each person wants, and whether they have any boundaries. Seek consent regularly.

Aftercare: Keep checking in on how the experience was. If something goes wrong, find support at a GP, or contact La Trobe wellbeing (www.latrobe.edu.au/wellbeing). Go to a hospital in an emergency.

Final note: maintaining the psychological safety of your partner/s is the best way for them to consider you an incredible sexual partner!

PREVENTING PREGNANCY

Type of sex: penetrative vaginal (penis-in-vagina)

Methods of safety: condoms, the Pill or implants for people with a uterus (see your GP), the withdrawal method (not our recommendation, it's fairly unreliable!), or engage in non-vaginal/ non-penetrative sex. To see all your contraceptive choices, see page 18.

Aftercare: The morning after pill is available at most pharmacies without a prescription – just ask the pharmacist. If you need a pregnancy test, you can buy them at the supermarket or pharmacy, or see your GP.

Final note: In Australia, there are a lot of choices if you find yourself with an unplanned pregnancy. For more, see page 15

HOLD YOUR JUDGEMENT

While it's normal to be curious about how other people live, sometimes we're quick to judge. Let's explore some activities that are (often unfairly) stereotyped and whether you should really care about what someone else is into.

HAVING MULTIPLE PARTNERS

Whether you're talking multiple partners at once, or one after another, well-communicated open or polygamous relationships can be fulfilling. In fact, there are benefits for people who enjoy these kinds of relationships – not only more attention, but also more release of pleasure hormones, and even knock-on positive impacts on physical health.

To keep multiple-partner encounters or relationships healthy, there's some non-negotiables:

- everyone involved should know about and consent to the type of relationship
- everyone involved should be on top of their sexual and reproductive health – that means regular STI and HIV tests, and use of barrier methods to prevent spread of disease

Verdict: if everyone in a multi-partner situation is aware and consenting, there is no harm. Hold your judgement!

PREFERRING ROUGH SEX

There is no shame in having preferences when it comes to sex. However, engaging in rough play does need to include safety and respect measures:

- make sure everyone involved knows what's going to happen and has consented – check in with each other as well
- agree on signs or a word that means someone needs to stop
- read up on the dangers of the acts you want to engage in so you can better understand any risks
- agree with your partner/s on a plan if anything doesn't go as planned

Verdict: if consent and safety are managed, hold your judgement!

NEVER HAD SEX

You probably don't want hear this (especially if you're a bit nosy), but whether someone's had sex before or hasn't (ie. is a virgin) isn't really anyone else's business. There are tons of reasons why people might wait or never have sex, and they're all different. Even if someone hasn't had sex, they might still enjoy other stuff like dating, cuddling, or masturbating. Or maybe not—that's totally okay too.

If someone's really upset about not having sex or connecting with someone physically, it's helpful to show some understanding. But if their frustration starts turning into anger—especially at people they think owe them sex—it might be a good idea to suggest talking to La Trobe Wellbeing Services or someone else who can help, for them or for you.

Similarly, not everyone has the same amount of interest in sex – having it, talking about it, even reading about it. And there is nothing at all wrong with that.

Not being interested doesn't even mean that someone is not having sex – maybe they just choose to keep quiet about it.

Sometimes problems pop up when friends or peers reach an age where some people are REALLY interested in sex, while others aren't. As people try to negotiate boundaries and comfort, it can cause arguments and often those less interested in sex are sometimes labeled as boring or immature, and those more interested can be labelled dirty (or, strangely, also immature). This is pretty likely to be untrue in general. Finding ways to connect on other topics is ideal, or maybe you choose to go your separate ways on this.

Verdict: There are lots of reasons someone may not want to engage in sex, or even discuss it. Everyone has the right to decide their own preferences. Hold your judgement!

IS WATCHING PORN OK?

First, let's think about what porn might be. It could include live action video, animation, or even images and podcasts referring to or depicting sexual acts. The definition is loose, but generally, it's any piece of media that is intended for sexual use or to cause sexual arousal.

People have lots of different opinions on porn, but in general, accessing pornography can be a good way of working out what we like. However, porn is sometimes used in ways that cause harm or are unhealthy.

Let's explore signs of **healthy** use of porn:

- Your pornography use is not negatively impacting your daily responsibilities or relationships
- You are in control of how often you access porn, and only do it when it's appropriate
- You are not using porn to control or escape your emotions
- You can "get off" without the use of pornography
- You can engage in pleasurable sexual activity without thinking about pornography
- You have a realistic perspective on real-life intimacy and an understanding that pornography is designed in a way that often does not accurately reflect reality

If you realise that any of these do not apply to you or someone you know, it may be helpful to consider seeking support to regain a healthier perspective on sex.

You might start by talking to wellbeing services at La Trobe, or calling Lifeline on 13 11 14.

There are some legal restrictions in Victoria that you and your peers may want to know about, like:

- Sexting or sending nudes when you're under 18 is illegal, even if it's consensual
- Releasing, sending or showing others sexual content sent to you is illegal if that person hasn't consented to others seeing it

Finally, if you are accessing free, live action video or photography through mainstream porn sites, women are often portrayed as simple sexual objects. These depictions can shape harmful attitudes and contribute to behaviours that cross into sexual violence. Look for content that reflects mutual respect where the people depicted all have agency and are provided safety and pay. This is more likely to be with a paid service.

Verdict: If someone is engaging safely with pornography, that doesn't hurt anyone. But there are a lot of ways porn can become an issue. Proceed with caution.

ENGAGING WITH "MASCULINITY" MEDIA (THE MANOSPHERE)

When people (usually men) engage with media creators focused on masculinity, they do so mainly to see an ideal: someone with money, success, and confidence.

However, the people making this content often have very strict rules about what men are allowed to do, and often talk about women in really derogatory ways.

When it comes down to it, the most popular masculinity creators also often have pretty serious problems, including legal issues and strings of unhealthy relationships – taking that into account, their life seems less ideal.

Studies on men who engage with creators like this show a few concerning things:

- They are more likely to have lowered self-esteem – they have been told that they are not good enough until they reach their ideal
- They are more likely to have negative beliefs about women, people of colour, members of the LGBTIQ+ community and other populations that don't fit their ideal of masculinity
- They are less likely to explore things that could make them feel fulfilled, happier or more pleasure if they don't fit the strict rules of masculinity set out for them
- They are more likely to consider violence in relationships as normal (and, as a reminder, it never is!)

This isn't about telling anyone off – but it's a good idea to consider what the media someone consumes makes them believe about the world. If you want to investigate your own social media use, there's a few things you can try:

- Spend 5 minutes scrolling a short form video platform, and note down themes – what does the algorithm say you should like?
- If you think maybe you're engaging with media that promotes strict gendered rules, consider what it is you like about it – and what you disagree with. Are there other creators that might give you the positives (like money making or professional tips) without some of the stuff that is harmful to you and your relationships?

Verdict: Unfortunately, much of this kind of media is based on really harmful stereotypes of gender, which can negatively impact self-esteem, behaviour and relationships. Try finding new media to engage with!



MONITORING THE HEALTH OF YOUR BITS

GET TO KNOW YOUR BODY

It's a great idea to explore your body and get to know it – take note of what your normal looks and feels like. While you can use images of others' bits to help, everyone's genitalia (and breast/chest tissue) looks and feels a bit different.

If, over time, you notice any changes (including in texture, new lumps and bumps, new fluids or smells, itchiness and burning, or pain or strange sensations during sex), make an appointment with your GP. We promise they've seen it ALL before, and will be grateful to see someone who is so proactive about their health!

TESTING FOR INFECTIONS

The most important thing to know is that you don't have to think you have an infection to get tested for one!

For an overall Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) test, you will need a simple urine or blood test requested by your GP.

Depending on how sexually active you are, you might have these tests more or less regularly than others. If you are sexually active and have more than one partner, an STI test every 6–12 months is recommended. The more people who test for STIs, the less they will spread in the community.

HIV TESTING

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a precursor to AIDS (Acquired Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome), and can be spread through many types of sex. Like STI tests, you don't need to think you have HIV to test for it.

You can get an HIV test free from your GP with a Medicare card. Please see your international health insurance if relevant for whether they cover this service. You can also visit a sexual health clinic – see the back cover for recommendations.

La Trobe University recommends Thorne Harbour for more information about HIV/AIDS prevention.
(<https://thorneharbour.org/>)

FOR PEOPLE WITH A CERVIX

Cervical Screening

Gone are the days of the dreaded “pap smear” test. Now, every 5 years, you can do a simple screen at your GP – it's just a self-administered swab, much like a Covid test (but in your vagina, rather than your nose).

Cervical screening searches for abnormal cells which can form cancers.

Cervical cancer sometimes forms after a Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection. Vaccines are available to prevent this infection spreading (for all bodies).

FOR PEOPLE WITH TESTICLES

Monitoring your testicles

Testicular cancer is rare, but it's one of the most common cancers for people aged 15–45. To self-monitor, get familiar with your balls – know what's normal for them, from feel to how they respond to environmental changes. If anything odd happens, make an appointment with a GP.

RED? GREEN? WHAT ABOUT AMBER FLAGS?

When it comes to relationships, you've probably heard of red flags (those really bad signs) and green flags (things that show someone's a good partner). But what about when you notice something that's just a little off? It's not exactly terrible, but it's also not a green flag. That's what we call an amber flag — and it's one you'll need to handle carefully.

TURN THAT AMBER TO GREEN

The key to turning an amber flag green is to identify and act on it as quickly as you can.

While you may think you're overreacting, if it's something that keeps coming up and keeps bothering you, it's time to have a talk about it. So how might you start that conversation?

1. Choose a time and place where you feel calm and you can talk privately.
2. Let someone else that you trust know that you're having this conversation, just so that you know you have someone to debrief with.
3. Use "I..." statements – explain how you feel when they behave in certain ways.
4. Let them talk and tell their side, but don't engage in arguing.
5. Consider if their response made you feel heard and safe. If it didn't, that's not a great sign.
6. Evaluate any behaviour change – if they are making positive changes, that's a good outcome. If they are not, that amber might be turning red.
7. Be clear about what you will and will not tolerate in the long term.
8. Support them to find help if they need it.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF THE FLAG TURNS RED?

If the amber behaviours aren't addressed (either they're ignored, or the person does not change), they may escalate and turn into red flags – those absolute deal breakers. But it's hard sometimes to know when that change happens. Some things to do if you have a partner with amber behaviours to help identify if they get worse:

- Tell a friend or someone you trust to keep an eye out with you
- Keep a diary of the behaviours you are concerned about. If they impact you more or become more frequent, that's a bad sign
- Notice how other people respond. If people show concern about your relationship, consider why that might be
- Be aware of your own responses – are you feeling more bothered or impacted? Don't ignore that.

The bottom line when considering whether an amber flag you've noticed becomes a deal breaker is more complicated than whether it bothers you. Also consider:

- Is it impacting your partner's ability to maintain positive relationships?
- Does it cause your partner or anyone else harm or distress?
- Does it make you feel that your physical or emotional safety isn't guaranteed with your partner?

AMBER FLAG BEHAVIOURS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Finding it hard to be vulnerable or show emotions
- Not wanting to have any difficult conversations
- Being overly or repeatedly nasty about their ex-partners or other people they no longer have positive relationships with
- Always wanting to know where you are, who you're with etc
- Always wanting to be right
- Uses alcohol and/or other drugs in a way that concerns you
- Lying (even if it's not all the time)
- Complains a lot and is often quite negative
- Doesn't have their own identity (activities, friends etc) outside of the relationship with you





BE BETTER IN BED

Studies show that women having sex with other women report the highest levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with their partners and with sex itself. Read on to reveal the secret sauce of great sex (no matter your gender or sexuality)...

Imagine the best sex of your life – there's probably a few things that come to mind, but the trends found in studies about sex satisfaction show a few must-dos for you and your partner/s to get the most out of your next session.

CARE ABOUT YOUR PARTNER'S PLEASURE

People who report the best sexual experiences say that their partners make sure they get what they want out of the experience (usually an orgasm, but not always). One of the techniques that can help is engaging in foreplay – touching, hugging and other intimate actions that lead up to the climactic act. Further, people reporting great sex say they find pleasure in spending energy and time to make sure their partner/s is satisfied too.

AGREE ON WHAT YOU'LL DO TOGETHER

You don't have to sit down with a notebook and question your partner/s, but knowing what they're up for (and communicating what you want) means that you can safely mutually fulfill each other's desires.

ENGAGE IN AFTERCARE

Aftercare can include a bunch of things, but in its most basic form, it's checking in with your partner/s after sex, and showing some kind of care or intimacy, like a cuddle, cleaning up together or chatting over a cup of tea. It can also extend to speaking about them respectfully to others, and keeping your experiences with them private if that is their preference. People that neglect this step are reported largely as the group who are the worst sexual partners.



Just a final hint for those who are engaging in sex with people with vulvas; only about 20% will orgasm from penetration of the vagina alone. This grows to over 80% orgasm rate with additional (or only) stimulation of the clitoris.

Interested in some of the studies we're referencing?

Justin R. Garcia, Elisabeth A. Lloyd, Kim Wallen, Helen E. Fisher, **Variation in Orgasm Occurrence by Sexual Orientation in a Sample of U.S. Singles**, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, Volume 11, Issue 11, November 2014, Pages 2645–2652, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12669>

Frederick, D.A., John, H.K.S., Garcia, J.R. et al. **Differences in Orgasm Frequency Among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Men and Women in a U.S. National Sample**. *Arch Sex Behav* 47, 273–288 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-0939-z>

THE ANCIENT EROTICA

AN EXPLORATION OF EROTIC ART ACROSS TIME AND PLACE



A depiction of Priapus, a Greek god of fertility, discovered in the House of Vettii, Pompeii. From somewhere between 89 BCE and 79 CE.

EROTIC ART HAS EXISTED IN ALMOST EVERY HUMAN GROUP THROUGHOUT HISTORY. IT'S SHOWN UP IN LOTS OF DIFFERENT WAYS AND CARRIED ALL KINDS OF MEANINGS.

Amongst the ruins of Pompeii lies incredible erotic art pieces – murals, paintings, sculptures and entire walls covered in depictions of gods with large erect penises, vivid sexual scenes and nudity all around. Not just confined to areas like brothels, this art decorates the entire city. First uncovered after the 77 CE volcanic eruption in the late 1800s, for over a century it was hidden from the public because of outdated censorship and conservative norms.

Now, there are many displays around the world of the unique and sometimes confronting Pompeii art pieces.

Where western cultures often used to imagine ancient cultures (especially non-western cultures) as prudish and restrictive, the presence of erotic art across ancient cultures around the world reflects a more liberal relationship of humans with sex, bodies and fertility.

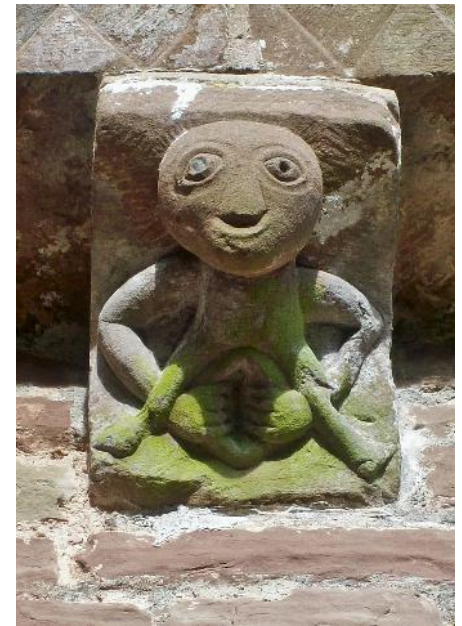
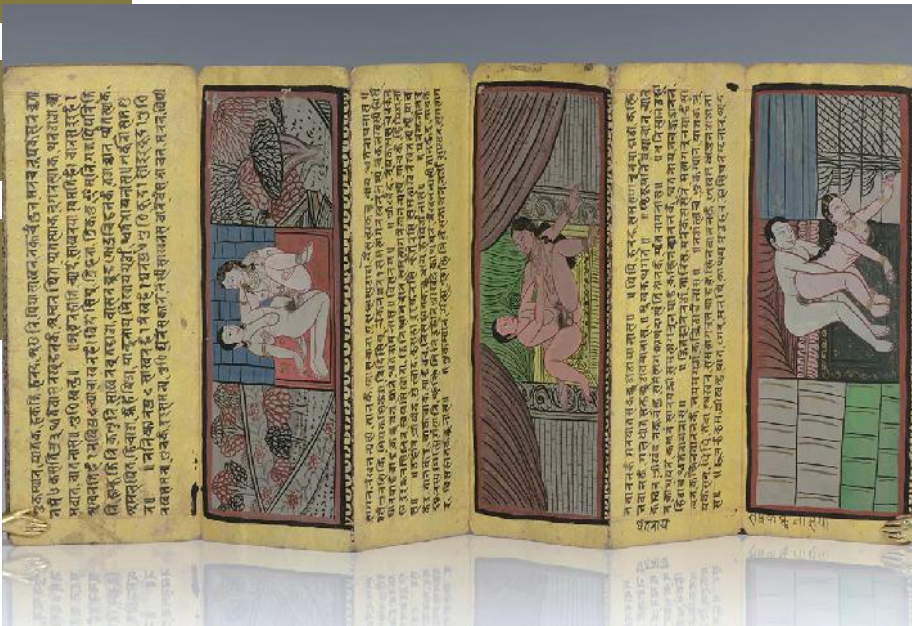
Sometimes erotic art has profound spiritual and symbolic meaning to the people in the societies that created it. However, some of these art pieces were created simply to titillate or tell stories, or as a joke.

What this kind of art tells us is that diverse peoples have always had connections to the erotic and always created stories around sexuality and bodies. The way that sex is depicted in art often tells us something about the norms around sex and bodies in that society.

Modern portrayals of sexuality still include traditional art forms like paintings, drawings, and sculptures, but they also embrace the possibilities offered by newer technologies such as film, photography, and broadcast media. Not much has changed, really – sex in modern art can be powerful in its symbolism and messaging, but it can also be storytelling, intended to turn people on, or just plain funny.

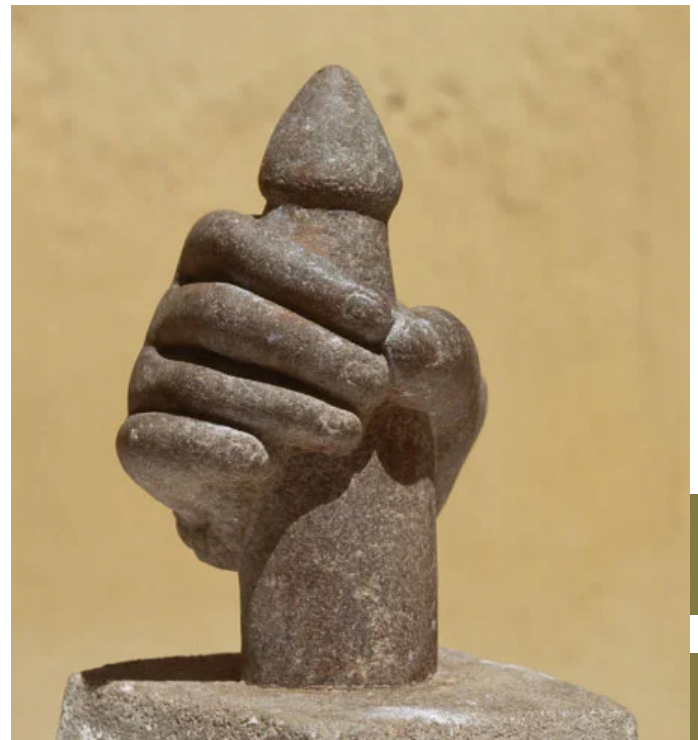


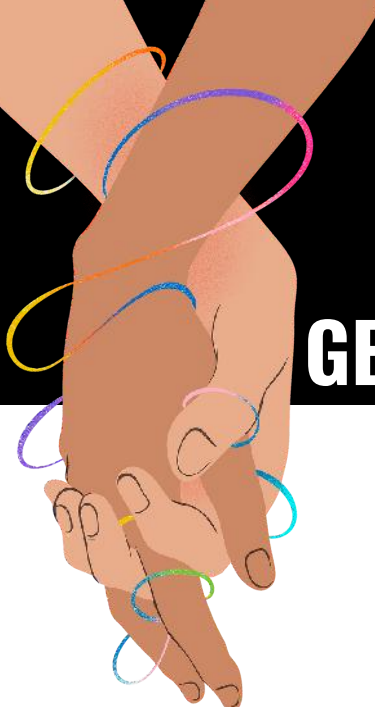
Aboriginal rock painting in Arnhem Land from about 28,000 years ago, showing two people engaged in sex.



Clockwise from upper left:

1. A reproduction of the original Kama sutra, an Indian Hindu Sanskrit text originating sometime in the 3rd century CE, written by Vātsyāyana. Despite popular belief, this is not just a manual about sexual positions, but a guide on living well and relating to others.
2. A Sheela-na-gig statue, found in Catholic churches in Ireland and England around the 11th Century. These statues depict older women pulling apart their labia. The meaning is debated, but they may be depictions of pagan goddesses to watch over pregnant mothers. Alternatively, some people think they might be pagan demons warning Catholic children to keep it in their pants.
3. This sixth-century Cham sculpture was excavated at the site of My Thuat in Vietnam Photograph: Leonard de Selva/Corbis





GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIVERSITY

Everyone has a right to express their gender and sexual identity in the way that feels right for them. To support inclusion, let's explore some of the gender and sexual identities you might come across. All these identities are experienced differently by individual people, sometimes these identities can change across someone's lifetime, and there are other identities out there too – we can't fit them all on one page!

GENDER IDENTITIES

Gender identity refers to someone's internal sense of self as a woman, man, both or neither. It's a personal experience. You may not be able to guess someone's gender identity based on the way they look or behave. Let's look a more at some ways people may describe their gender:



Cisgender: someone who remains the gender they were assigned at birth.



Transgender: someone who does not remain the gender they were assigned at birth. They may be a transgender woman, transgender man, or identify as gender non-binary.



Non-binary: someone who doesn't identify within the gender binary; they are not a woman or a man – they may be neither, both, or somewhere in between.



Intersex: not strictly a gender, but usually represented as a gendered group. Intersex people are born with both male and female anatomy, genetics and/or physiology. They may identify as any other gender group above throughout their lives.

WHERE DO LGBTIQA+ AND QUEER FIT IN?



Use the QR code to find out more about LGBTIQA+ life and community at La Trobe.

People who do not identify as cisgender and heterosexual may identify themselves as "LGBTIQA+" or Queer. People who are cisgender and heterosexual who actively include, celebrate and advocate for the rights of gender and sexually diverse people sometimes call themselves "allies".

SEXUALITY

Someone's sexuality refers to the gender/s that someone finds sexually attractive, in general. Of course, this doesn't mean they will find EVERY person with that gender identity attractive.



Heterosexual: people attracted to people at the other end of the binary (men to women, and women to men)



Gay: men who are attracted to other men. Also referred to as homosexual. Sometimes others who are not heterosexual will also use this word to describe their sexuality



Lesbian: women who are attracted to other women. Also referred to as homosexual or sapphic.



Bisexual: someone who is attracted to people of more than one gender



Pansexual: someone attracted to various people, regardless of gender



Asexual: someone who does not experience sexual attraction. This does not necessarily mean they don't have partners or even sex.

NOTE: these definitions are generalised – there will be diversity within these groups too.

DID YOU KNOW THAT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY HAS A QUEER SPECIALIST COUNSELLING SERVICE? FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.LATROBE.EDU.AU/WEELLBEING

PREGNANCY - WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

Around 50% of all pregnancies in Australia are unplanned, and there are a range of options available for those who find themselves in this position.

In Victoria, you can:

- Continue the pregnancy and care for the baby yourself
- Abort the pregnancy ("have an abortion") if you are less than 24 weeks pregnant
- Continue the pregnancy and choose alternative care arrangements for the baby (this might include kinship care, where a member of your family takes over care; adoption; or foster care)



The first step before you make any of these decisions is to confirm that you are pregnant. You can buy home urine pregnancy tests from your supermarket or pharmacy, or you can go to your GP. If a home urine pregnancy test is positive (or if you need to make sure for your own peace of mind), make a GP appointment as soon as you can, and they will help you navigate the next steps.

The sooner you can access GP care in your pregnancy, the more options will be available to you.



For information about contraception, pregnancy options and sexual health.



yes IT'S SAFE TO HAVE SEX WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR PERIOD

AND OTHER MENSTRUAL MUST-KNOWS FOR EVERYBODY

Ah, periods. About half the population will have them, and yet, they still baffle us in so many ways! Menstruation is different for everyone that experiences it, but we're going to take you on a journey through some of the most-Google'd menstruation questions, and give you the answers without the sometimes-confusing medical jargon.

WHAT IS MENSTRUAL BLOOD?

The "blood" from menstruation isn't just red blood cells – it's also made up of mucus and thickened uterine lining. This lining thickens during the month, preparing for potential pregnancy. If there is no pregnancy, it's removed through menstruation. Some people will notice that the colour and consistency of their menstrual blood may change each month, or over several months. It's normal for menstrual blood colour to range from very dark browns and reds to pinks. Sometimes people may notice "clots" with their period blood – this is usually larger sections of uterine lining.

MANAGING PERIOD DISCOMFORT

Not everyone feels much discomfort during their period, but some people really do! For abdominal pain, heat packs can help, as can curling your body up, or lying down, and some people find light exercise helps. If you are looking to take medication for your pain, Ibuprofen will help with cramping and headaches. If your headaches are still bothering you, you can safely take Paracetamol at the same time as Ibuprofen.

Some people feel some emotional changes in the lead up and during their period. This can include food cravings, mood swings, and feeling down. Communicating with others how you're feeling can mean that you don't feel as forced to pretend everything feels 100%. Taking a day to lounge around and having some snacks helps a lot of people who experience this.

Some individuals may experience issues such as unusually strong-smelling flatulence or bowel movements, which can sometimes be accompanied by diarrhea or constipation. Don't worry, this is normal, and while it might feel embarrassing or uncomfortable, it will stop in a couple of days.

WHAT'S A "NORMAL" PERIOD?

This is a BIG question, and it's important to first know what's normal for you – take note of patterns when you are menstruating (and throughout the rest of your cycle), and make an appointment with a GP if things don't seem right.

Most people's "cycle" (the time between bleeding) is about 28 days/ a month, but it can vary a lot – some people will never have regular periods, they'll just come and go. For some people, periods are uncomfortable, as they can include cramping in your lower abdominals, headaches, tiredness and some mood swings.

For most people, their period lasts from a couple of days to about a week, with the 1st to 3rd day being the heaviest bleeding.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR ABOUT MY PERIOD?

You can check in with your GP/doctor as often as you like about your period. Here are some key times that you might make sure you make an appointment:

- You want to talk about contraception
- You have pain or heavy bleeding that feels like it's unmanageable
- Your periods start behaving differently for more than one cycle – this might include painful symptoms, becoming irregular or stopping, or other changes
- You think you're pregnant
- Your emotional symptoms feel unmanageable, or go on longer than usual
- You start to see clots that are larger than your thumbnail
- Related, but not specific to periods – if you have pain during sex or when using inserted menstrual products (tampons, cups, discs)

CHOOSING MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

There are a range of modern items that prevent menstrual blood making it onto clothing and other objects. Some are one-use, and there is a trend to more multiple-use items. The decision about menstrual products is personal and usually takes into account a range of factors, including cost, comfort, usual amount of bleeding and cultural norms.

Here is a rundown of some of the most common menstrual products in Australia:

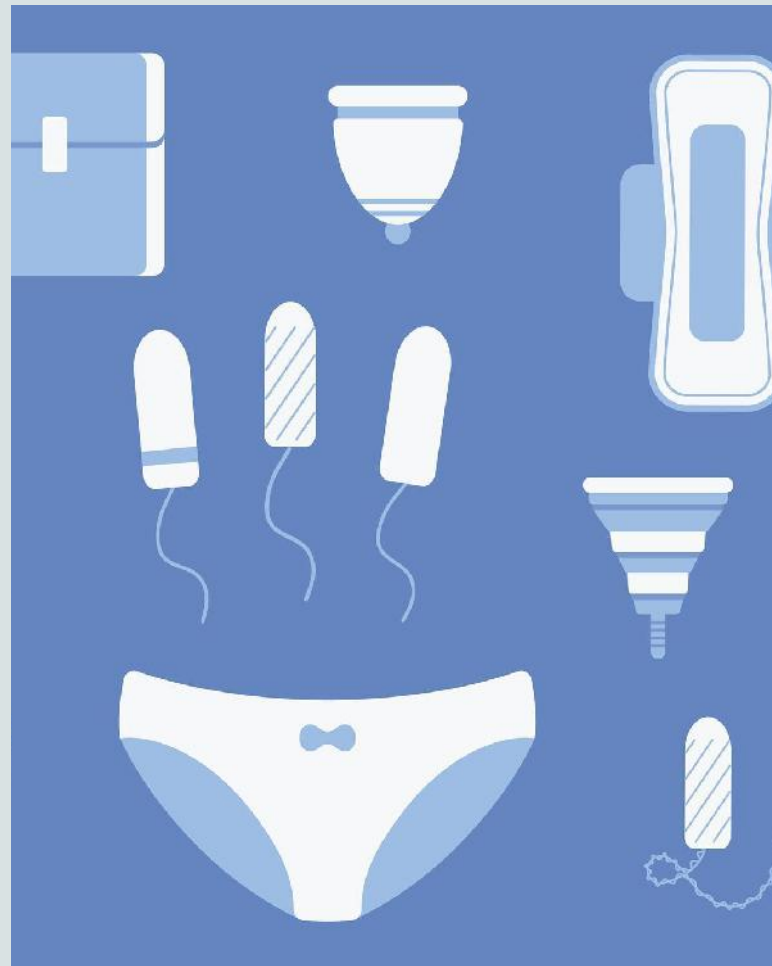
- Pads – single use or multi-use, these attach to underwear to catch menstrual blood
- Tampons – single use, inserted into the vagina to soak up menstrual blood before it leaves the body. Tampons can be harmful if left inside the vagina too long
- Cups and discs – multi-use silicon products that are inserted into the vagina to catch the blood before it leaves the body. The blood is dumped out before re-insertion. These products must be regularly sanitised for safety
- Period undies – multi-use, these undies catch blood in them, and then are washed to be reused

Some people choose to free-bleed – use no menstrual products at all.

WHAT IF MY PERIOD STOPS?

This may be something to check in with a GP about, but it's good to know some of the reasons why periods stop. Here are some of the things your GP might ask about:

- Your age – if you're over 35, your doctor may consider if you've entered perimenopause, or even menopause. This can come with some big emotional and physical changes, as your body is changing its hormones – it's like puberty all over again. People going through these changes often report fluctuating body temperature, mood swings, weight gain and generally feeling tired, as well as changes or cessation of their period
- Your weight, specifically if your weight has changed – sometimes if someone's weight changes quickly (especially losing a lot of weight), it can impact their periods as the body needs certain nutrients to prepare for safe pregnancy, and therefore to have a period
- Whether you are using contraception – some contraceptives interrupt or stop your period
- Your stress levels – stress impacts our health in many ways, and it can interrupt periods too



SEX ON YOUR PERIOD

This is one of the most-Googled period topics!

It is safe to have sex while you're having your period. It is safe to have sex with someone who is having their period.

Now we've gotten that out of the way, let's get into a few of the extra nuances and details you might want to know before you go ahead:

- You can still get pregnant if you have penetrative vaginal sex without adequate contraception while on your period
- It can be messy – you might want to think about where, when and how you'll clean up if you're planning period sex
- Let your partner/s know that you're having your period – surprise blood can be uncomfortable, and can be distressing if it's unexplained
- Take out any inserted menstrual products unless they specifically say they can be used during sex (this is true of some disc options)

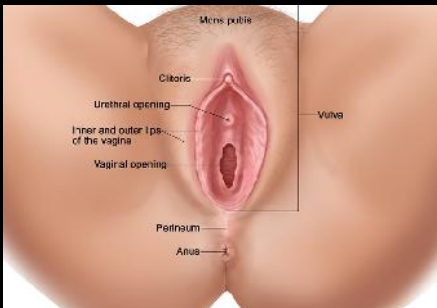


Choices in Contraception

Make an appointment with your GP to find out more

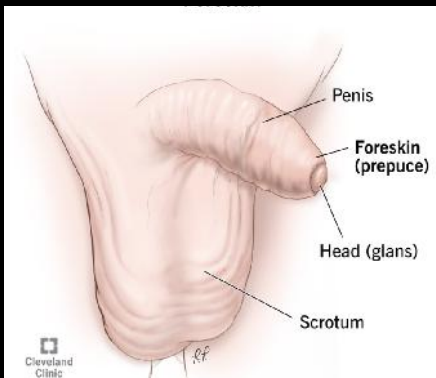
KEEP IT CLEAN

PEOPLE WITH A VULVA



- Only clean the outside parts – the inside is self-cleaning!
- ALWAYS wipe after using the toilet from front to back to avoid waste getting inside the vaginal cavity
- Some people may need to gently pull back the skin covering their clitoris to remove dead skin build up

PEOPLE WITH A PENIS



- If you have a foreskin, gently pull it back and clean underneath with warm water, removing any dead skin cell build up

Part of overall hygiene is making sure your genitals (and the things that go near your genitals) are clean. However, those bits are **SENSITIVE!** For that reason, you should never use harsh soaps (you can get genital-friendly soaps at the supermarket or chemist if you like to use it), and you should be gentle – no scrubbing.

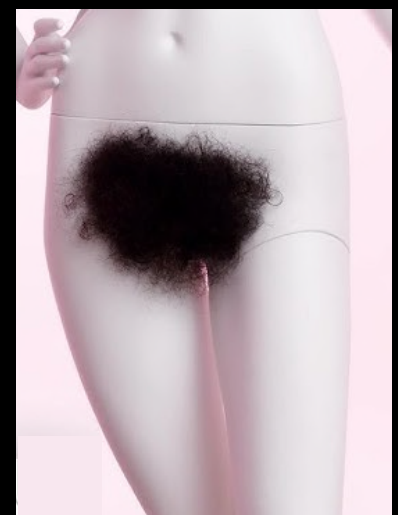
It's recommended that you shower or bathe at least every couple of days, change your underwear each day and choose underwear that's made of natural fibres like cotton or bamboo.

CLEANING YOUR TOYS



Hard plastics, glass or stainless steel can be wiped with a washcloth dampened with warm water and a little soap. Silicon and leather can be wiped with a washcloth with warm water and antibacterial soap.

SHAVE OR NO SHAVE?



There is no hygiene reason that says you must shave – a bush is as clean as bare skin (if you shower or bathe regularly)

WORDS TO ADD TO YOUR VOCABULARY

ABORTION

A medical procedure where a pregnancy is deliberately stopped and the cells that might eventually become a baby if left to grow are removed.

CONTRACEPTION

Something that is used to prevent pregnancy

GP

A general practitioner – your everyday doctor. They have a vast knowledge, and can help you find specialists if they can't help with your health question

ADOLESCENCE

The life stage that includes the onset of puberty, usually beginning around 10 years old and can last until around 25 years old.

FORESKIN

A retractable roll of skin covering the end of the penis. Some people with penises have this removed for various reasons.

ORGASM

The pleasurable climax of sexual stimulation

INTIMACY

A physical or emotional closeness

CLITORIS

A y-shaped organ that appears externally as small nub at the front of the vulva that contains nerve endings and is sensitive to stimulation

VULVA

The name for the collection of visible structures surrounding the vaginal opening

PERIOD

Used interchangeably with “menstruation”, the (roughly monthly) time when someone with a uterus is losing menstrual blood

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF THIS PUBLICATION

Fill out the short survey at the QR code, or direct any additional feedback to respect@latrobe.edu.au



If we didn't answer your questions in this publication, or you just want to know more, we recommend

**GO ASK
ALICE!**
goaskalice.colombia.edu

CONSENT is ABOUT RESPECT

IT MUST HAPPEN
BEFORE AND DURING
ANY ACTIVITY

"Do you want to keep going?"

ASK if the activity is what they want.

IT NEEDS TO BE
FREELY GIVEN
WITHOUT PRESSURE

PAY ATTENTION TO BODY LANGUAGE

CONSENT IS ALSO ABOUT
COMMUNICATING
PLEASURE AND
BOUNDARIES

"What would you like to happen next?"

"WHAT DO YOU ENJOY?"



The Hook Up Volume 1 concept, design and words by Megan Campbell (2025)

La Trobe services



**La Trobe University
Wellbeing Services**



**La Trobe University
Safer Community**

External support options



**headspace (for anyone
aged 25 or under)**



Sexual Health Victoria



**Bendigo Community
Health Services**



**Melbourne Sexual
Health**