What is sexual health?
Sexual health involves the physical aspects of sexual relationships, pregnancy and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It is also about how to build healthy relationships.

Are things different in Australia?
Yes, they may be different for students from some countries. In Australia, sex education is taught in secondary schools. This includes information about sex, but also about how to develop healthy, respectful relationships.

Many couples marry in Australia, but it is also acceptable for people to have sex before marriage or to live together without being married. Many types of relationships, including same-sex relationships, are legal in Australia and it is against the law to treat anyone unfairly because of their choice of partner.

Sometimes students form connections with others of the same sex which is not unusual in Australia. This can be a challenging time of change for some people.

What is safe sex?
Sex is meant to be an enjoyable experience for all people. Being safe with sex means caring for both your own health and enjoyment, and the health and enjoyment of your partner.

Safe sex is when semen, vaginal fluids or blood are not passed from the body of one person to another during sex. Practising safe sex is important for a healthy sex life to reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy and getting or passing on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

You can improve your safety when having sex by doing the following:
• Always using a condom if you are having sex and a dam (flat latex barrier) if you are having oral sex;
• Having regular STI tests if you are sexually active;
• Limiting your number of sexual partners;
• Seeking advice from a doctor if you are worried about your sexual health.

For a list of health and relationship services, see the back of this fact sheet.

How can I get ready for a respectful sexual relationship?
Starting a new relationship can be exciting and fun. Healthy relationships are based on respectful, caring and open communication. They can also be a great form of support, especially if you are living away from family and friends.

You should always practise ‘safe sex’, whether you are in a long-term relationship or if you are having casual sex. Either way, agreeing on safe sex with your partner is very important.

For a safe relationship, remember:
• Always be respectful to your partner;
• Always get consent from all partners before and during any sexual activity;
• Never assault, exploit or harm others;
• In Australia, it is the responsibility of men and women to practise safe sex.

You should not be pressured to have sex with someone unless you are ready - even if you are married. This is your right in Australia.
Sexually Transmissible Infections

What is a Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI)?
An STI is an infection passed on (or ‘transmitted’) during sexual activity through close body contact or the exchange of body fluids such as semen, vaginal fluids, saliva or blood. Like other infections, STIs are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. There are many types of STIs, each has different symptoms and is treated differently.

Anyone can get an STI, but in Australia they are most common in sexually active people between 15 and 29 years of age. You should not be embarrassed to seek help, because STIs are common and most can be treated. An STI that is not treated can lead to serious and painful health effects, ranging from temporary discomfort to infertility.

To protect yourself and your sexual partner from STIs, you should always practise safe sex by using condoms and/or a dental dam during sexual contact. You can get free condoms and dams from the UWA Medical Centre.

How do I know if I have an STI?
Many people with an STI do not have any signs or symptoms. Often they do not even know they are infected. For example, in Australia there are high rates of the STI “Chlamydia” but many people do not know they have it.

Common signs and symptoms of an STI include:
- Unusual discharge from the penis, vagina or anus
- Itchiness around the genital area
- A burning feeling when peeing
- A rash, sores or small lumps on or around the penis, vagina or anus
- Unusual bleeding from the vagina (after sex or between periods)
- Pain and swelling in the testicles
- Pain during sex
- Sore throat
- Swollen glands, fever and body aches.

Remember that some people do not experience any symptoms - the only way to be certain that you, or your sexual partner, do not have an STI is to get an STI test.

When should I get tested for a STI?
It’s wise to have regular sexual health check-ups when you:
- Start having sex;
- Change sexual partners;
- Start a new relationship; or
- Have any of the signs and symptoms of an STI.

Tests are quick, painless and confidential. The information you tell will remain private between you and the doctor or nurse - they will not tell your lecturers, immigration or your family. This is your right in Australia.

A full list of STI testing services are at the end of this fact sheet.

What if I think I have been exposed HIV/AIDS?

IMPORTANT: if you or someone else may have been exposed to HIV through contact with blood or bodily fluids from an HIV-positive person, you should seek medical advice immediately.

Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is a treatment that may prevent HIV infection and is available to anyone likely to have been exposed to HIV within the previous 72 hours (3 days). It is a combination of anti-HIV drugs that must be taken over a 4-week period.

Because the treatment must occur with 72 hours of being exposed to HIV, it is important that you get advice from a hospital as soon as possible. Waiting to make an appointment with a doctor may waste valuable time.

What if my partner and I both test negative to an STI?
If you test negative for an STI, you still need to protect yourself and your future sexual partners by continuing to practise safe sex.

What if I travel overseas?
Some STIs (such as HIV) are more common in other countries than in Australia. It is important to remember this and to continue safe sex practices while travelling overseas.

If you decide to go on a holiday or if you are going to visit family and friends in your home country, always travel with a supply of condoms so that you are easily able to continue safe sex.

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**Contraception and pregnancy**

**How do I prevent pregnancy?**

If you are having sex regularly, or just sometimes, it is important that you use an effective form of contraception if you want to avoid getting pregnant. Contraception is another word for ‘birth control’. In Australia, both men and women are responsible for contraception, not just women.

In Australia, unmarried students as well as married students can visit their doctor to get contraception or advice. This is the culture in Australia as many people have sex before marriage.

The contraceptive pill and condoms are the most common ways for preventing unplanned pregnancy and STIs, but there are many other options that are more effective and longer lasting. Some kinds of longer lasting contraception are also partly covered by your OSHC insurance. Make an appointment with a doctor to discuss what is best for you.

For more information on different birth control options in Australia, visit our website at: [www.share.uwa.edu.au](http://www.share.uwa.edu.au)

**What is the Emergency Contraceptive Pill and how can it help me?**

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) or ‘morning after pill’ contains a dose of the female hormone progestogen.

The ECP can help reduce the risk of pregnancy if you’ve had sex in the last 5 days and:

- You forgot to take your regular contraceptive pill
- The condom broke
- You’ve had unprotected sex

The ECP works by stopping or delaying release of the egg. It does not disrupt an established pregnancy - it is not an abortion pill. It is about 85% effective at preventing pregnancies. Effectiveness depends on the stage of your monthly cycle and how soon after unprotected sex the ECP is taken.

When you ask for the ECP, the health care provider will need to ask you a few questions about your health.

**IMPORTANT: You should not use the Emergency Contraceptive Pill as a regular form of contraception.**

**I think I might be pregnant – what should I do?**

Signs and symptoms of pregnancy include a missed or late period, sore breasts, feeling sick or tired and needing to pee frequently.

If you think you might be pregnant, you should do a pregnancy test. You can get a test at a doctor’s office or medical centre or you can buy a home pregnancy testing kit at a chemist or supermarket.

**I am pregnant – what should I do?**

If you are pregnant, you can discuss the following options with your GP:

- Have an abortion to end the pregnancy
- Continue with the pregnancy and become a parent
- Continue with the pregnancy and consider adoption for the baby

OSHC insurance usually includes a 12 month waiting period for any abortion, pregnancy or birth-related medical services. For more information contact your OSHC provider.

**What is sexual assault?**

Sexual assault is when you have been forced to participate in any unwanted sexual activity.

Sexual assault is a crime and is not acceptable behaviour in Australia. It doesn’t matter if you know the person who sexually assaulted you – this includes your boyfriend, girlfriend, family member or partner by marriage or commitment. It is still a crime.

If you have been raped, sexually abused or threatened, you should telephone the police on 131 444.

**IMPORTANT: if you are in a life-threatening situation, you should telephone 000 immediately**
Telephone helplines are available if you prefer not to talk face-to-face:

**BeyondBlue**
If you need to talk to someone about your emotional health or relationships.
Open 24 hours, every day. Also have a number of online fact sheets with information on mental health.
Telephone: 1300 22 4636
www.beyondblue.org.au

**MensLine Australia**
Provide online and telephone support, information and referral for men with family and relationship concerns.
Open 24 hours, every day of the year.
Telephone: 1300 789 978
www.menslineaus.org.au

**Sexual Health Helpline**
Confidential telephone service for sexual health matters.
Open weekdays 10:00am-4:00pm.
Telephone: (+61 8) 9227 6178 or 1800 198 205 (rural only)

**Women’s Domestic Violence Helpline**
Provide support and counselling for women going through family or domestic violence.
Telephone: (+61 8) 9223 1188 or 1800 007 339 (24 hours, 7 days)

Health Promotion Unit
The University of Western Australia
M319, Perth WA 6009 Australia
Tel: +61 8 6488 3173
Email: healthpromotion@uwa.edu.au
fitforstudy.uwa.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Code: 00126G