

## Are you ready for some pillow talk?

Sexual and reproductive health is a core aspect of our identity and an important part of health and well-being. Our sexuality is part of our personality and we are all sexual beings from birth until death.

The *World Health Organization (WHO)* is the public health arm of the United Nations. They say that being sexually healthy is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. Sexual health also means having a respectful approach to sexuality, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences. This includes the sexual rights of everyone to be respected, protected and fulfilled.

There are many reasons why it is important to be aware of your sexual and reproductive health. Sexual health is not just a personal subject, it is a global one. Many people all over the world do not have access to affordable sexual health services. As well many youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer and questioning are at increased risk for violence and bullying.

Everyone has the right to accurate sexual health information and to have a realistic understanding of what sexual health is. By having the right information it allows people to take better care of themselves. Unfortunately many people wait until an issue arises before talking to their health care provider about their sexual well-being, but it should be a routine part of the visit.

It is often difficult to open up about sex and we are often reluctant to talk about it but it is important to talk about especially with a trusted health care provider. To be sexually healthy people need a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships. Action Canada for Sexual Health Rights states that an important part of that is a positive relationship between clients/patients and their health care provider. Being able to communicate openly and freely with a health care provider is vital to sexual and reproductive health.

Benefits to having frequent discussion about sexual health with your health care provider can include:

- Earlier detection (of certain illness/diseases)
- Testing for sexually transmitted infections
- Safer sex counselling
- Increased immunizations

A discussion about your sexual history can help your health care provider provide you with quality tailored care. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are very common, and often they have no obvious signs or symptoms. You can have an STI and not even know it. By talking to your healthcare provider it can determine the need for testing.

It is a good idea to ask if there are any vaccines that may be recommended for you. Your health care provider can also talk to you about the need for screening for certain cancers such as breast or prostate cancers. Health care providers can also help by referring you to other services you may need.

It is important to feel comfortable talking to your health care provider. The information that you share is confidential. Positive relationships between clients/patients and providers improves health outcomes and provides better access to services.

It is important to work together to build healthy bodies, healthy partnerships and healthy communities.

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