

Taking a Sexual History

What: Your patient’s sexual history is an essential part of their comprehensive health history.

Why: You are practicing patient centered care when you ask a patient about their sexual partners and practices. This provides opportunities to educate and counsel patients about HIV/STIs, and determine the correct treatment and care specific to them.

How: Take a sexual history for **ALL** patients. This can be done during any visit, by you, the provider, or completed by the patient on a form, either in person or electronically prior to the visit.

Approach	
Sex Positive	Risk Based/Traditional
Sex is healthy	Sex is risky
Normalized	Stigmatizes, shames
Focus on disease prevention as well as relationship building, sexual pleasure and lifespan changes	Focus on disease prevention only
Encourages development of healthy relationships and sexuality	Ignores developmental and relational aspects of sexual health
Welcomes diverse identities, orientations and practices	Makes assumptions
Patient centered	Provider/Risk centered

Best Practices for Obtaining a Sexual History	
Be aware of own implicit bias and assumptions; such as, towards race, gender, education level, income level or sexual orientation and/or identity	Be sensitive and matter of fact
Assure confidentiality and a safe environment, including a verbal acknowledgment (very important for persons living in a small town)	Ask permission (trauma-informed care)
Use open-ended questions to receive more information than a yes or no response	Introduce the topic and start the conversation
Invite the patient’s agenda – patient centered environment	Normalize sexual health and the conversation surrounding it

The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center and the National Association of Community Health Centers prepared framework for making sexual history a part of normal office visit efforts. This framework is provided in the document [Taking Routine Histories of Sexual Health: A System-Wide Approach for Health Centers](#), November 2015. They identify a simple categorization of sexual history questions to help remember which topics to cover. These are called the Five P’s (5P’s).

5P’s: Partners Practices Past History Protection Pregnancy Planning

Recently the [National Coalition for Sexual Health](#) developed a 6th P. This P is “Plus” and includes the topics of Pleasure, Problems and Pride.

NEW 6th P: Plus = Pleasure, Problems and Pride

References: [National LGBTQIA Health Education Center](#)
[National Coalition for Sexual Health](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)



Sample Questions

Partners

- How many sex partners have you had in the past year?
 - How many sex partners has (have) your sex partner(s) had in the past year?
 - Have you ever received physical, sexual or emotional violence from a partner?
- What is/are the gender(s) of your sex partner(s)?

Practices

- What kind of sex have you had in the last year? Vaginal sex? Oral sex? Anal sex?
- Have you or your sex partner(s) ever shared needles or other drug materials?
 - Cookers, Tourniquet, Cotton Ball
- Have you or your sex partner(s) ever exchanged sex for life needs? (money, housing, safety, drugs)
- How often do you have sex while drunk or high?

Past History of HIV/STIs

- Have you ever been told you had HIV or a STI?
 - Can you tell me when, what kind and if you took medicine?
 - What kind of signs/symptoms did you have?
 - Have you been tested for other STIs?
- Have any of your sex partners had STIs?
 - Can you tell me when, what kind and if they took medicine?

Protection from HIV/STIs

- Tell me how you protect yourself from HIV/STIs?
- How often do you use condoms or barrier methods?
 - How do you decide when/if to use condoms/barriers?
 - There are many reasons people choose not to use condoms. Can you tell me about yours?

Pregnancy Planning

- Do you have plans/desires to have children? (or more children)
- What are you and your partner(s) doing to prevent pregnancy? (if needed)
- Assess timing, importance of prevention, conduct preconception education
 - What information do you need to plan for a healthy pregnancy?

Plus

- How is your sex life?
- What difficulties are you having with your sex life or during sex?
- What support do you have about your gender identity and/or sexual orientation?

Below is a list of resources you can use to help guide your practice and make the process of taking a sexual history more comfortable for both you and your patients.

Resource	Website
2021 STI Treatment Guidelines: CDC	https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm
National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center	https://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/
Guide to Taking a Sexual History: CDC	https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/sexualhistory.pdf
National Coalition for Sexual Health	https://nationalcoalitionforsexualhealth.org/
Project Implicit (Harvard University)	https://www.projectimplicit.net/
American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists	https://www.aasect.org/

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References: [National LGBTQIA Health Education Center](#)
[National Coalition for Sexual Health](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)