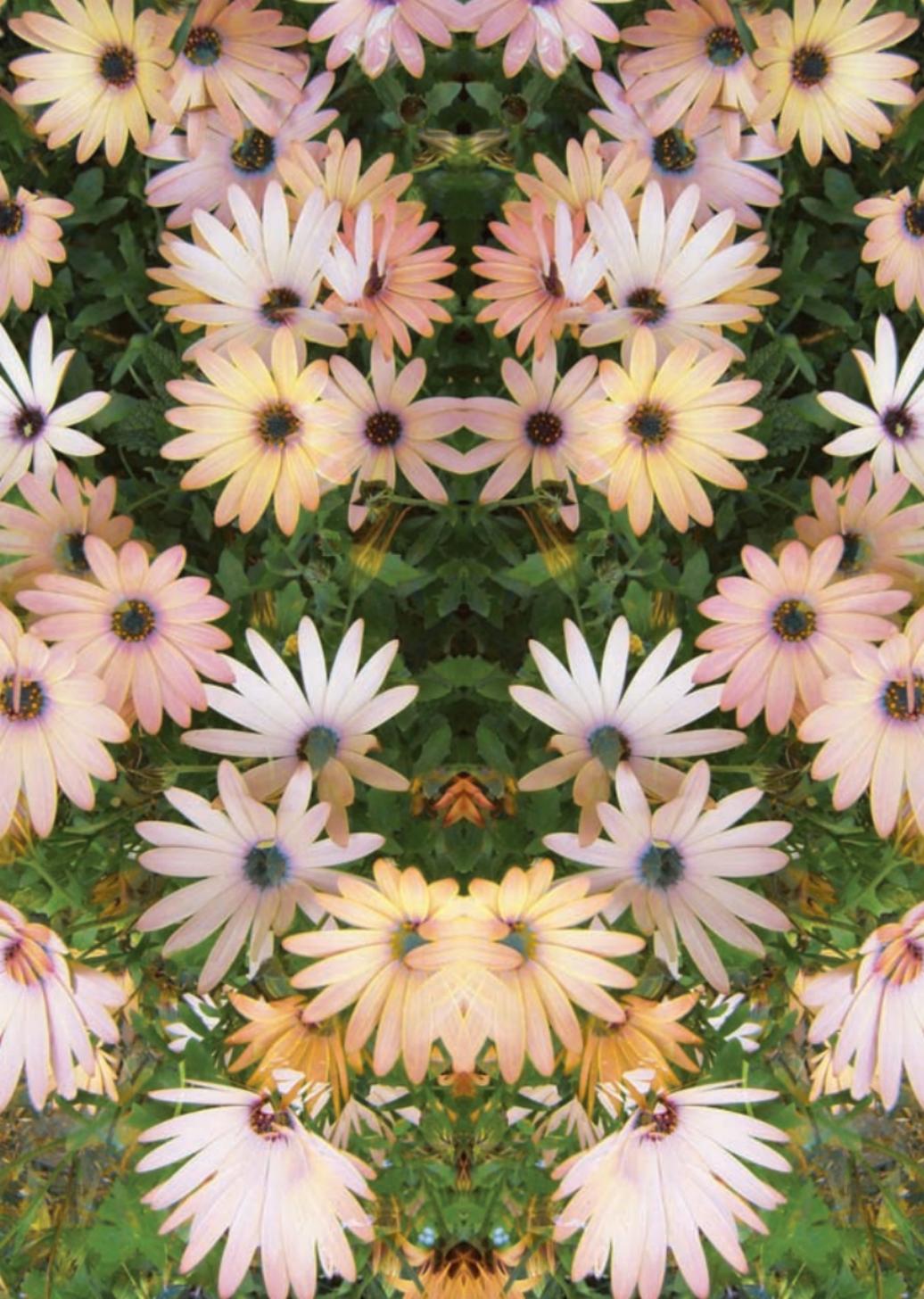


# ANAL PLAY

for men and  
for women



“Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.”

*Definition of sexual health, World Health Organisation*

## **SAFER SEX**

**Using condoms for penetrative sex is the best way to protect yourself and your partners from Sexually Transmitted Infections, including HIV. Condoms also offer good protection from unwanted pregnancy. In the text of this booklet, we have chosen not to refer constantly to the use of condoms. Instead, we encourage you to make your own decisions about protecting yourself and others in each instance of sexual activity you undertake.**

## ANAL PLAY

This booklet is for people who want to explore the erotic sensations available from anal play and/or anal penetration, either as the recipient or the giver. The idea of anal play may be completely new to you, or you may have wondered about it but never tried it. Or you may have tried it and experienced discomfort — but would still like to try it again.

The anus is highly sensitive and rich in nerve endings. Touching, licking, massaging or penetrating it with a finger, penis or sex toy can provide very pleasurable sensations for both men and women. It is widely believed that only gay men engage in anal play or anal penetration, but this is not the case. Many lesbians and heterosexuals enjoy this part of their bodies, and some gay men don't engage in anal play of any kind.

It is not uncommon for people to have mixed feelings about exploring anal pleasure — this is a region of our bodies that is often taboo and that has been associated with dirtiness (although some people find breaking taboos part of the appeal). You may worry that you will smell or taste bad, even if you have emptied your bowels. But if you have a bath or shower and wash as usual before engaging in anal play or penetration, you should be clean enough.

Some people are more concerned than others about cleanliness in this context, and sometimes they wash inside their rectum before anal sex, using a douche. A douche is a device for squirting water up your anus or vagina, to clean it out.

Anal douching is not recommended because:

- it washes away the protective mucous in your rectum, leaving you more open to infection;
- it can cause irritation to the rectal lining (especially if you use ready-filled douches containing chemicals), which will let infection through even more easily; and
- with some douches, it can be difficult to control the pressure or quantity of water entering you, and some nozzles may cause tiny injuries to your rectum.

If, after reading the above, you still feel you want to douche, it is important that you use only plain, clean water at body temperature. And we recommend that, if you do use a douche, you use only the small rubber bulb type. However, you should be aware that even plain, clean water can irritate the lining of your rectum and make you more vulnerable to infection.

## ARE THERE ANY HEALTH RISKS FROM ANAL SEX?

All sexual activities except masturbation involve coming into contact with another person's body — and with any bacteria or viruses they may have. That's why it's a good idea for anyone who is sexually active to have regular sexual health check-ups.

We also need to educate ourselves about the possibilities and risks of picking up or passing on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), so we can make choices about who to have what kinds of sex with and what precautions to take in each instance.

So it is important to understand that anal sex carries a few more risks than vaginal sex for the transmission of STIs, including HIV. This is because:

- The rectum is a lot less robust than the vagina. The walls of the rectum are very thin and easily damaged, and even tiny, invisible tears or grazes can allow bacteria or viruses to pass through.
- The lining of the rectum is very absorbent, and will soak up any fluids, such as semen, along with any bacteria or virus particles that may be present, and pass them straight into the bloodstream.

- Unlike the vagina, the rectum is not self-lubricating. The tiny amount of mucous present in the rectum is not enough to make penetration easy or comfortable. Using a lubricant (lube) for anal penetration not only protects the rectum from damage, it also enhances the pleasure.

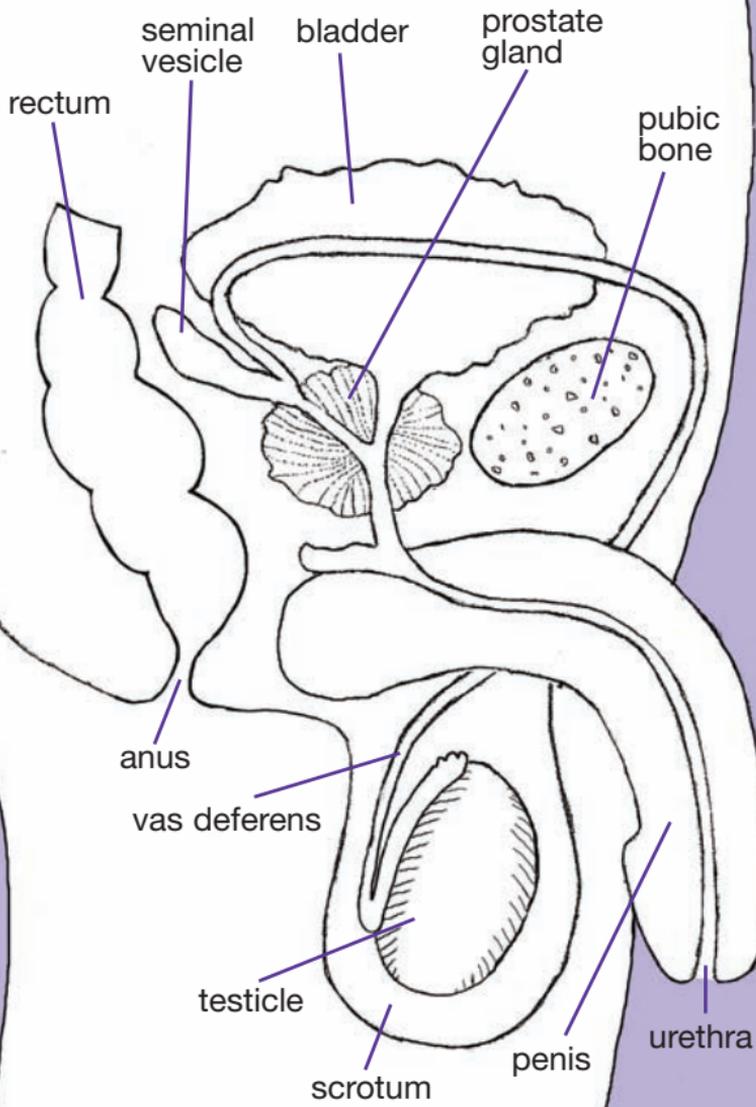
If you and/or your partners are worried about passing on infections through any aspect of anal play, but still want to go ahead, you can put a barrier between you, using cling film, dental dams or cut-up condoms for anilingus (rimming) and condoms or latex gloves for anal penetration with penis, hand or sex toys. Be sure to change condoms or gloves between uses/partners.

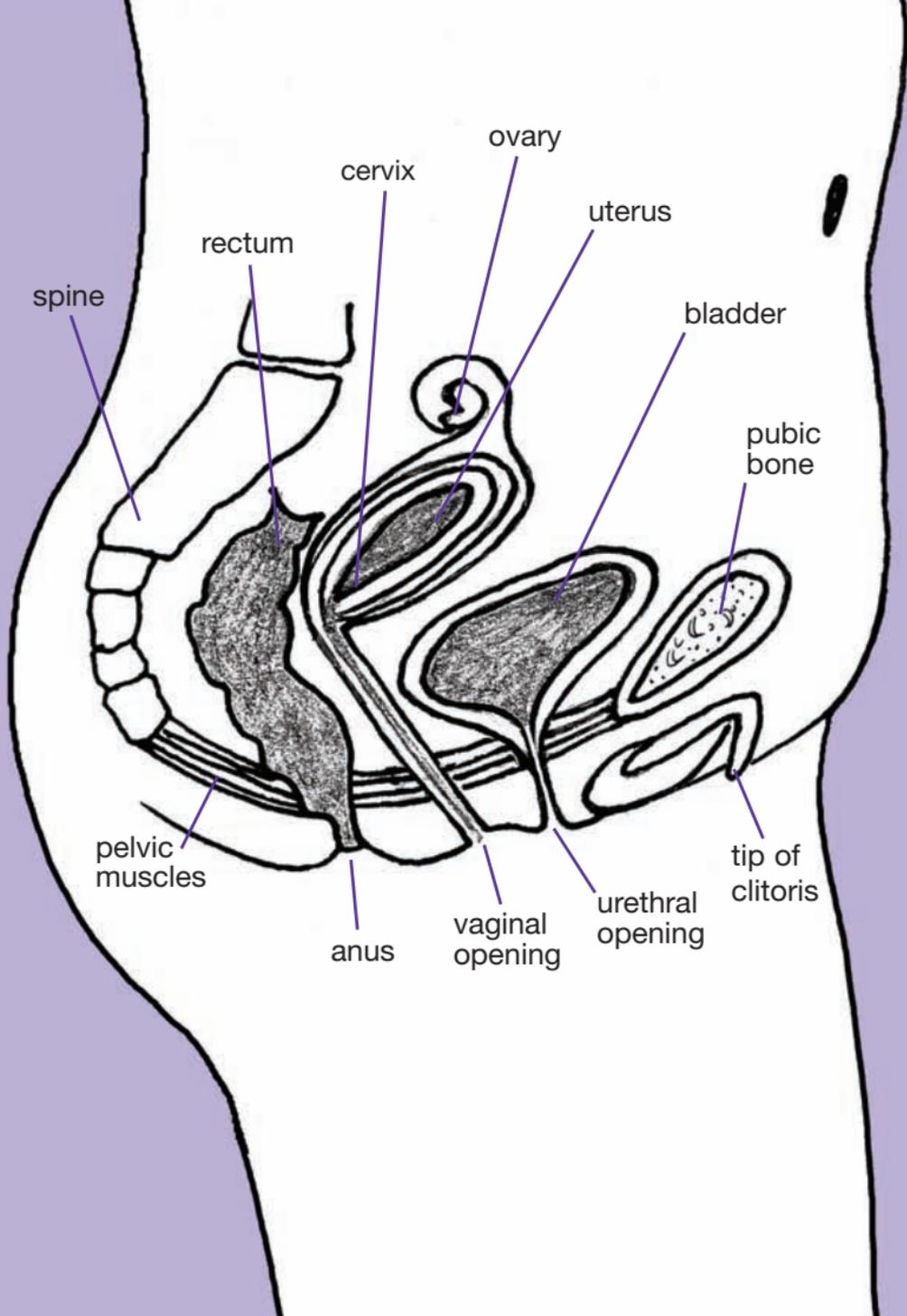
There are a lot of myths about harms associated with anal penetration — that it will give you haemorrhoids (piles), for example. or make you incontinent. None of these are true.

## ANILINGUS (RIMMING)

Using your tongue and lips on and around the anus can give your partner an array of pleasurable sensations. Here are some ideas for things to try, to see what turns you and your partner on (you can stimulate their genitals at the same time if you like):

- Kiss, nibble or lick their inner thighs and buttocks.
- Lightly circle their anus with your tongue and flick it against the opening.
- Lay your tongue flat against their anus and rub it against the opening.
- Spread the buttocks apart with your hands and press your tongue into their anus.
- Ask your partner what they would like to try — be as creative as you like!





## ANAL PENETRATION AND SEXUAL AROUSAL

There is a complex interaction between our brains and our genitals via messages sent up and down the spinal column. These kick-start the body's natural sexual arousal response.

If we are experiencing touch as pleasurable, or the thoughts that we are having are sexual and positive, changes take place in the body that make sexual touch and penetration more comfortable and pleasurable. In order to understand how pain happens, it is useful to really understand what happens to your body when you are turned on.

As we become aroused, our heart rate and blood pressure increase. There are changes to our genitals, too: erections in men and vaginal lubrication and increased sensitivity of the clitoris in women. Other muscles may also become slightly more tense. You may feel your heart beating faster, and you may start to breathe faster and deeper.

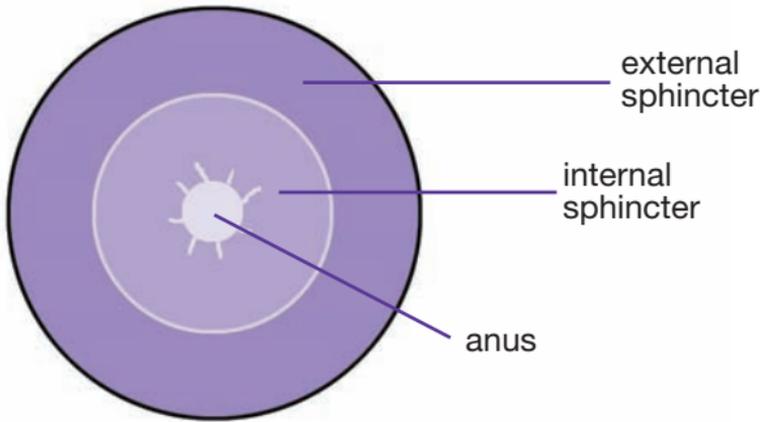
In both men and women, the anus becomes more sensitive to touch and the rectum expands. However, unlike the vagina, the rectum doesn't produce any natural lubrication.

These physical changes all happen to prepare your body for sexual contact, and to make sexual touch feel comfortable and enjoyable. It is important that you give your body time to react to sexual stimulation and to undergo these changes, so that you don't feel any discomfort during a sexual experience.

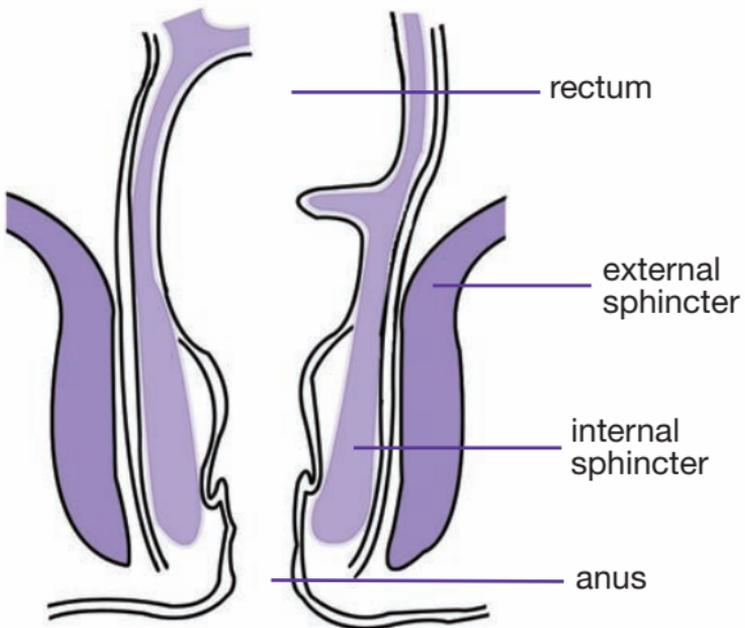
It is also important that your sexual partners understand this, and that they respond to your feedback about how turned on you feel. If you are not turned on enough, or foreplay has not lasted long enough for these changes to take place, sexual touch or penetration may feel uncomfortable or even painful.

As you can see in the drawing opposite, there are two sphincters (rings of muscle) just inside the anus. The external one is a voluntary muscle, which you can flex as you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles. The internal sphincter is an involuntary muscle that will clamp shut in an automatic response if you try to insert anything into it. This can lead to unpleasant, painful or disappointing experiences of anal sex.

However, as with other reflex muscles, you can train it to relax (as you do when learning not to blink while inserting contact lenses, for example). For this reason it can be helpful to become familiar with your own



View from below — rings of muscle



Side view — cross section

anus by exploring it using a well-lubricated finger (make sure that your hands are clean and your fingernails are short and well-filed).

You can stroke and circle the anal opening before slipping the tip of your finger inside, and wait for the internal sphincter to relax. This can take from a few seconds to half a minute or more — breathe deeply, focus on the sensations, and only move your finger further in when you feel ready.

You can experiment with different strokes (circular, stroking, sliding slightly in and out) and discover which sensations you enjoy. This will help you to be able to tell partners how to please you, as well as give you ideas about how you can stimulate them.

In men, anal penetration stimulates the prostate gland (see page 7), producing intensely pleasurable sensations that can result in orgasm. Similarly, in women, anal penetration can provide indirect stimulation of the G-spot, which is an area many women experience as highly sensitive, and which is located inside the vagina on the front wall.



## ANAL PENETRATION AND PAIN

Feeling any sort of pain during anal penetration can have a negative effect on your enjoyment. Sex ought to be an enjoyable and happy experience for both partners, and if you are experiencing pain, or are anxious about the possibility of feeling pain, you are probably not going to be able to relax and enjoy yourself. Discomfort on anal penetration, though fairly common, is not something you should endure.

As we have seen, being sexually aroused is a necessary part of enjoying anal penetration. However, if we are worried or anxious about something, the body's arousal response can't work properly. It may be interrupted or it may not happen at all. This will mean that the physical changes that make sexual touch and penetration comfortable won't take place, and penetration is likely to be uncomfortable or painful as a result. Not only that, but feeling pain on one occasion can lead you to expect pain the next time you have sex. Anticipating pain in this way can further interrupt your body's arousal response, cause tension in your pelvic muscles and make pain more likely.

There are other worries you might have during sex that could have the same effect. For example, you

may never have had anal sex before and be worried about it hurting, or you may have had unwanted or unpleasant sexual experiences in the past. You might have more general worries, for example about how your body looks or about whether your partner will find traces of faeces. You might be anxious about catching or transmitting HIV or other STIs, or just preoccupied with things happening at work or difficulties in your relationship. Any of these can have an effect on your ability to relax and feel turned on and enjoy a sexual experience.

## HOW CAN THIS BOOKLET HELP?

It contains exercises designed to help make anal penetration more comfortable and pleasurable. They are similar to the exercises and ideas that a psychosexual counsellor or therapist would introduce you to. You can work through as many of them as you choose, at your own pace, either alone or with a partner.



## EXERCISES FOR ANAL PENETRATION

The exercises below are for men or women who want to experience anal penetration but have found this difficult or uncomfortable or who feel anxious about it.

Penetration can be done with a finger, penis, hand or sex toy, but make sure that any object you use has a flared base so that it can't get lost inside. If you are using a dildo, it's better to use one that is soft and flexible rather than hard and rigid, so it follows the contours of your rectum more easily.

If you are doing the exercises with a partner, check out with them beforehand that they understand the point of the exercise and are willing to follow your pace, and remember that the keys to pleasurable anal penetration are communication, relaxation and lubrication — you can't have too much of any of them!

We suggest you try some of these exercises a couple of times a week. The times given for each exercise are just suggestions. It's important that you are fully comfortable with each stage before you move on, if you want to. (You may decide that you don't want to complete all the exercises.) Slow down or stop if you feel any physical discomfort and seek medical advice if you experience any pain or bleeding.

## EXERCISES YOU CAN DO ON YOUR OWN

**EXERCISE** *a few minutes a day*

### KEGEL EXERCISES

Learning to relax your internal anal sphincter is a necessary part of learning to enjoy anal sex. These exercises help with that, because doing them makes you more aware of all the muscles around your anus and genitals.

Kegel exercises target the muscles that run from the pubic bone to the base of the spine like an 'elasticated hammock' underneath the pelvis (they are shown in the illustration on page 8). The contractions of these muscles produce the feelings at orgasm — but they are also involved in the spasms that can make penetration painful, difficult or impossible.

A lack of exercise or being overweight can contribute to a weakening of the pelvic muscles. People who practise Kegel exercises report that they are more aware of whether their muscles are relaxed or tense, so they are better able to ensure they are relaxed when penetration occurs. Strengthening these muscles can also result in better erections and more intense orgasms.



You can feel these muscles by contracting your anus as though you're trying to hold back a bowel movement, or by stopping the flow of urine when you're peeing. At first you might find you're contracting your stomach or thigh muscles as well, but with practice you can squeeze just the pelvic muscles.

Begin by squeezing and releasing these muscles fifteen times, a couple of times a day. You can do this without anyone noticing, for example while driving, watching TV, or reading.

Do the exercises every day, gradually increasing the number until you can do about 50. At this point, instead of releasing the muscles immediately, you can hold the contractions for a few seconds. You can do both the long and short Kegels a couple of times a day, or alternate between them.

Most people don't notice results until after about a month or six weeks, but if you practice them consistently you will feel the difference. To check the improvement in the strength of these muscles, you can insert a finger into your anus and feel the strength of the squeeze as you contract the muscles.

## **EXERCISES** *10-15 minutes*

### **PRACTISING ANAL PENETRATION**

When anal penetration has been difficult, or if you have never tried it before, you can gradually introduce it, stage by stage, and at your own pace. The following exercises are especially useful if you have developed an association between penetration and pain (or worrying about pain) over time.

Using your fingers or a small sex toy, you can learn to relax the muscles around the entrance of your anus, and get used to having something inside.

Try to practise penetration every day, for about ten minutes at a time at first. The more regularly you practise, the more rapid your progress will be. Make sure you can practise somewhere comfortable where you won't be disturbed.

It is important to use plenty of lube, such as KY jelly, which you can get free from a GUM or contraceptive clinic, or buy from a chemist or a sex shop.

Apply a generous amount of lube to your finger or the sex toy, to help it go in smoothly. It is important to make yourself relaxed and comfortable before trying to put it into your anus. When you feel ready, try

gently pushing the finger inside, as far as you feel comfortable. If you are using a toy, remember to use one with a flared base and keep hold of it.

If it feels uncomfortable or painful or it doesn't seem to go in, it is probably because your internal anal sphincter has tightened up. This is simply a reflex response, and you can learn to relax it. There is plenty of room inside, and with time and practice your muscles will start to relax and allow the sex toy or finger to go in.

As you push the sex toy or finger in, remember that any pain or discomfort will go away once your muscles stop resisting. If you have difficulty inserting it, you might like to try using a different position, for example squatting or kneeling. Use the techniques you learned in the Kegel exercises to relax the muscles in your pelvis, legs and buttocks before and during practice sessions, and breathe slowly to help you relax.

It may take several attempts, but once you are confident putting it in, it is useful to leave the sex toy or finger inside you until you feel completely comfortable with it. You may have to do this on several occasions before you are able to feel really comfortable and relaxed.

When you are ready to take out the sex toy or finger, push it out with your muscles as well as pulling it out with your hand. Sometimes this can be uncomfortable because the muscles around the entrance to your anus may tighten around the sex toy or finger and be reluctant to let it go!

When you can insert a small sex toy or finger with little or no discomfort, you are ready to move on to something larger, if you want to. Many people enjoy being penetrated with something small, such as a finger or toy, and have no desire to move on to bigger objects. If you do, you can repeat the exercise as many times as you like, gradually increasing the number of fingers or the size of toys used.



## MOVING ON TO PENETRATION WITH A PARTNER

When you have worked through the exercises above, and if you feel you would like to be penetrated by a partner's finger, penis or strap-on dildo, you can try the exercises below. If you can show your partner this booklet or talk them through what you have been doing, it might help them to understand how they can help make this a successful experience for you.

The most important things for your partner to know are that you need to feel sufficiently turned on, so that the internal changes that take place to make sex feel comfortable have happened, and that they should take a lead from you about when you are ready for penetration, and by what (e.g. penis/finger). They should also go slowly and stop, use plenty of lube and slow down or withdraw if you ask them to.

### **EXERCISES** *10-15 minutes*

#### GRADUAL INSERTION OF FINGER OR OBJECT

The aim is for your partner to gradually insert an object (finger, small sex toy, etc.) into your anus, in stages, so that you can become comfortable with being penetrated in this way. You should choose a position which is comfortable for both of you, and



check with your partner that they understand they are to follow your pace and what you feel comfortable with. Use more lube than you think you'll need and add more as you go along if you need to.

Get your partner to place the object to be inserted at the entrance to your anus, and insert just the tip to begin with. Wait until your anal sphincter has relaxed completely before your partner moves it any further in, and make sure that they only do so when you let them know that you're ready.

Take a few moments to get used to the feeling. Let your partner continue moving the object further in, in stages. Wait until you are totally comfortable with each stage before asking them to move further inside. Once the finger or object is fully in, stay still for a few minutes and focus on the sensations you feel with the object inside you.

You can stop at this point if you choose, and move on to other sexual activities — or swap round and penetrate your partner if they want you to. Remember to use a new condom if you're sharing a sex toy (or wash it) and use fresh lube.

You'll probably find that you only need to do this exercise a few times before you can feel comfortable and enjoy the sensation of being penetrated. Then you can move on to penetration by something bigger if you wish to.

**EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

**GRADUAL INSERTION OF PENIS OR DILDO**

This exercise is for people who want to get more comfortable with being penetrated by their partner's penis or strap-on dildo. Some people find it easiest to have their partner lie on their back and then kneel astride them, with one leg either side of theirs. You can experiment and find the position that works best for you, as long as it's comfortable enough for you both to stay in for 5 or 10 minutes. Before you begin, tell your partner whether you are comfortable with them ejaculating inside you or not.

Your partner should then place their penis or dildo at the entrance to your anus, and gradually insert just the tip. As before, they should then wait until you let them know that your internal sphincter has relaxed before they move further in. As before, they should follow your lead in how much and how fast they enter you. Allow your partner to stay inside you



for as long as you feel comfortable. If you would like to incorporate movement into your anal penetration, you can move on to the next exercise.

**EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

**PENIS OR DILDO INSIDE WITH MOVEMENT**

This is similar to the previous exercises except that it includes movement, which should start slowly. It doesn't matter which of you is moving, and this will depend on what position you're using — but whoever is being penetrated is in charge of how much movement, when to stop, and when to resume. The point is for you to stay relaxed, communicate with your partner and focus on the sensations and how aroused you feel.

Start at a very slow pace and make sure you're both comfortable with it before increasing the movement (if you want to move faster). Increase the pace as you feel comfortable but slow down or pause if you feel uncomfortable or anxious in any way. If you do this consistently, you'll become used to and able to enjoy more and more movement.

When you're comfortable with movement in one position, you can try other positions if you like.

You don't need to do it as part of a formal exercise, but remember that any new position can be a bit awkward and/or uncomfortable at first. So when you try a new position, begin with slow movement, and work up gradually to a pace that both you and your partner can enjoy.

**“Remember, if you smoke  
after sex, you're doing it  
too fast.”**

*Woody Allen*

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *What if I'm penetrating my partner and I lose my erection?*

This happens once in a while for most men, but if it's a real problem, there are a few different things you can try. Make sure you're relaxed; if not, take some deep breaths and focus on positive thoughts and images. If you're already inside your partner, you can stay there and try to get the stimulation you want — for example, moving in certain ways, or getting them to squeeze their pelvic muscles. Or you can withdraw from them and use whatever stimulation works well for you, and go back to penetration when you're hard again.

If this regularly happens, you may want to read another of the booklets in the 'Better Sex' series, ***Worried About Staying Hard? - for men and their partners***, which includes information and exercises you can do to improve your erections.

- *What if my partner and I want to try fisting?*

If you and/or your partner want to try fisting, you can start by inserting one finger, and gradually add a second and third finger until four fingers are inserted up to the widest part of the hand. Keep adding more

lube throughout, and if you meet resistance, pull back for a bit. You can slide your hand straight in or twist as you insert it. Once your hand is in up to the wrist, stay still for a while so that you can both get used to the sensations, and then follow your partner's requests — you can rotate your hand, ball it into a fist, move gently in and out, apply pressure or stroke the rectum. Or you can stimulate your partner (or have them stimulate themselves) to orgasm if they wish, while leaving your hand inside them. Be careful to withdraw your hand slowly and gently.

Fisting takes time and patience, and for most people requires trust, as it can produce very intense sensations and feelings of vulnerability. Never force your body or your partner's to accommodate more than feels pleasurable at the time. If you want to know more about fisting you can access some of the resources at the end of this booklet.

- *Is it normal to experience pain the first time I have anal sex?*

Some people find their first experience of anal sex uncomfortable or painful. This is largely due to the resistance of the sphincter muscles at first and can be made worse by worrying about feeling pain, but it usually gets better with time and experience. Many

men and women hear stories as they are growing up about anal sex being painful, or even 'wrong'. Unfortunately this can sometimes lead to bad experiences because when we are expecting pain (or feeling bad about what we are doing sexually), we are less likely to get turned on (and not being turned on, as we have said before, can make penetration painful). The exercises in this leaflet should help you overcome any experiences of pain that you have had.

- *What if I still have problems?*

You might find it helpful to read other booklets in this series — see the list on the back cover. You can pick them up from the racks at the clinic, or ask a clinician for a copy. Or you could ask your doctor about getting referred to a psychosexual counsellor or therapist to talk more about these issues, or contact one of the organisations listed on page 34.



## **FINDING PSYCHOSEXUAL/RELATIONSHIP THERAPY:**

For further information about the services we provide, including psychosexual therapy, STI testing and sexual health advice, visit [www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk](http://www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk)

### **British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy (BASRT)**

Information and lists of individual and couple psychosexual therapists

<http://www.basrt.org.uk>      020 8543 2707

### **Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health**

[www.sashuk.org.uk](http://www.sashuk.org.uk)

### **Relationship Counselling for London**

[www.counselling4london.com](http://www.counselling4london.com)      020 8938 2431

### **PACE**

Sexual health and relationship counselling for lesbians and gay men      [www.pacehealth.org.uk](http://www.pacehealth.org.uk)

### **RELATE**

Psychosexual counselling for men and women of all sexualities      [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

### **GMFA**

Groups and workshops for men who have sex with men  
[www.gmfa.org.uk](http://www.gmfa.org.uk)

## **RECOMMENDED READING:**

*Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Men*

Bill Brent, Cleis Press

*Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women*

Tristan Taormino, Cleis Press

*Anal Pleasure and Health: A Guide for Men and Women*

Jack Morin, Down There Press



**This booklet has been written by the Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy Team and edited, designed and illustrated by the Good Sexual Health Team. Both are part of Camden Provider Services.**

**For further information about the services we provide, visit [www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk](http://www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk)**

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**OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES:**

**WORRIED ABOUT STAYING HARD?**

**for men and their partners**

**PROBLEMS CONTROLLING WHEN YOU COME?**

**for men and their partners**

**HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SEX**

**for men and their partners**

**HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SEX**

**for women and their partners**

**DIFFICULTIES WITH PENETRATION  
OR PAINFUL SEX?**

**for women and their partners**