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HEALTH

How to talk to a doctor about sex

A short, plain guide: what to say, what to expect, and what you are allowed to ask.

FREE GUIDE · ENGLISH EDITION

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You are not the only one who finds this hard.

9 in 10

male patients in a Swiss survey said they would like their doctor to ask about their sexual health.

4 in 10

had ever talked about their sexual life with a doctor.

In that survey, being embarrassed was linked to not having the conversation at all.

Doctors can be uneasy too. In one small study of 10 trainee doctors, none asked male patients about sexual function on admission. Embarrassment and lack of time were among the reasons. After a short teaching session, most said they would start asking.

So if your doctor does not bring it up, it does not mean your question is strange. You can start the conversation.

Five minutes before you go

1. What is bothering you, in one or two sentences.
2. Since when, and how often.
3. What you have already tried.
4. Any medicines or supplements you take.
5. What you want from the visit: information, tests, treatment or reassurance.

Bring the note. If the words will not come, you can hand it over.

Lines you can use

You do not need perfect words. Pick one line and say it, or show what you wrote.

- "There is something personal I would like to talk about. Is now a good time?"
- "I am a bit nervous, so I have written it down."
- "I have a question about my sexual health."
- "This is awkward for me, but it matters, so I would like to ask."
- "Can you tell me if this is normal?"
- "Whatever I tell you stays between us, right?"
- "Could you explain that in simpler words?"
- "What should I do next, and when should I come back?"

A good doctor will ask your permission before personal questions and explain why they are asking.

What a doctor may ask, and why

Doctors use a standard checklist called the "5 Ps". They ask everyone, so it is not about you.

Partners	How many partners, and who. This helps judge the risk of infection.
Practices	What kind of sex. This decides which tests are right.
Protection	Condoms or other ways. This is about lowering risk.
Past STIs	Earlier infections or tests, so nothing is missed or repeated.
Pregnancy plans	Whether you are planning a baby, and contraception.

Some doctors also ask if sex is satisfying or if anything is bothering you. This is a normal part of sexual health.

Your choices in the room

- Ask why a question is being asked.
- Say "I would rather not answer that now."
- Ask to pause, or to stop.
- Ask how your records are kept and who can see them.
- Ask for a chaperone for any examination.
- Ask to see a different doctor if you do not feel comfortable.

When not to wait

These need care quickly. Do not wait for an appointment.

An erection that lasts more than 4 hours, and is not from sexual activity. Go to an emergency department now.

Sudden, severe pain in one testicle. This is an emergency. The sooner it is treated, the better the chance of saving the testicle.

Pain in the genitals with fever or chills. See a doctor urgently.

Sores, blisters, unusual discharge, or burning when you pass urine. See a doctor soon.

You think you may have been exposed to HIV in the last 72 hours. Go to a hospital emergency department. Medicine to prevent infection works best when started as early as possible, ideally within 24 hours and no later than 72 hours.

Take this with you

- [ ] What is bothering me (one line)
- [ ] Since when, and how often
- [ ] Medicines and supplements I take
- [ ] Three questions I want answered
- [ ] I want: information / tests / treatment / reassurance

About this guide

Written by Dr. Sara Alisha Khan, MBBS. Registered with the Madhya Pradesh Medical Council, Reg. No. MPMC 31272. Online consultations are available at intimahealth.in. If you want to talk to a doctor about anything in this guide, any registered doctor can help.

This guide is for general education. It does not diagnose, treat or replace care from a doctor. In an emergency, call 112 or go to the nearest hospital. Version 1.0, November 2026. This guide is checked against its sources and updated.

Sources

1 Talking about sexuality with the physician: are patients receiving what they wish? Swiss Medical Weekly, 2011 (survey of male outpatients).

2 Improving trainee confidence in male sexual dysfunction history-taking in an acute inpatient unit (quality improvement project, small sample). PMC11738713.

3 CDC "5 Ps" sexual history, and the National Coalition for Sexual Health tool "Sexual Health Questions to Ask All Patients" (adds a 6th P: pleasure, problems, pride).

4 Sexual Health History: Techniques and Tips. American Family Physician, 2020.

5 WHO Guidelines for HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, 2024; HIV.gov, Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

6 Healthdirect Australia, Prolonged erection; British Association of Urological Surgeons patient leaflet, Priapism.

7 NHS Essex, Testicular torsion: symptoms and urgent emergency advice; MedlinePlus.