

## **Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Disability**

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) do not discriminate between people with disabilities and able-bodied people. Just as many people assume that a person with a disability can't be sexual they may also assume that a person with a disability is not vulnerable to STD's. This is not the case.

Men with disabilities may be at greater risk of contracting an STD because of frequent abrasions on the penis related to the use of urinary drainage equipment such as condom catheters.

Women with disabilities may not notice symptoms of an infection if sensation to the genital area is changed.

Even if an attendant helps to provide genital care, the presence of an STD may not be noticed. It is important that all sexually active people – regardless of gender, sexual orientation or physical ability – be encouraged to use safe sex methods.

All sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, syphilis, AIDS and genital warts, can and do strike people with disabilities.

Using a condom is the most recommended method of preventing sexually transmitted disease. If your injury or disability affects your hand function and it is difficult to open the condom package, to put the condom on or take it off, you will need to get your partner to do that for you.

Some people with brain injuries may have difficulty remembering when they need to use a condom. They will need to be reminded by their partner or find some way of cueing themselves to put a condom on.

AIDS is not the only STD but it is important to prevent it from spreading from person to person. There is no known cure for AIDS and people who have no symptoms can pass it on. AIDS can damage the immune system and over time may lower resistance to other diseases.

It is important to know how to take appropriate safe sex measures. Most cities have AIDS and STD information networks and organizations. There is also lots of information available on the Internet.

Your local community health centre will be able to provide you with the most up-to-date information on safe sex practices and all STD's. Wearing a condom is the single most important thing you can do to prevent transmission of most STD's.

**Medical Disclaimer:** The above information is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always ask your physician or other qualified health professional about any matter concerning your individual health.

**Revised:** January, 2007, by Sally Breen, RN, BSN

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**For further information:** Contact the Sexual Health Rehab Service, GF Strong Rehab Centre