

understanding the choices we make

a booklet for men who
want to stay HIV negative





© 2007 This booklet has been developed by Kerri Allwood, Allwood & Associates Training & Consulting Group, for Queensland Association for Healthy Communities.

This booklet is based on Motivational Interviewing Techniques (Miller & Rollnick, 1991) which have been found to be highly effective in changing behaviour. We gratefully acknowledge The Terrence Higgins Trust booklet 'The Heat of the Moment' which has also been used as the basis for this resource.

**this booklet will help your sex life....
*reduce your risks & avoid the worries!!!***

While you wait for your HIV test result take the time to read through this booklet.

This booklet can help you to avoid taking risks in your sex life that can result in HIV. If you can avoid those risks in the future, you can avoid a whole lot of stress and worry.

Most men know how to stay safe, but this booklet will help you deal with the reality that is, there is more to staying safe than just knowing about condoms!

This booklet will help you to stay safe by understanding yourself and the reasons why you've had risky sex in the past.

We look at what goes on in your head and the choices you make in those situations where you get carried away in the heat of the moment.

By working through this booklet **page-by-page**, and thinking about past risky sex, you can make a real difference to the future choices you make.

Change isn't easy, but if you want to avoid HIV and a hell of a lot of worry, regret, and trouble, it's worth spending some time working through this booklet.

To make a start, you'll need a pen, about 25 minutes and the space to think.

When you return for your test results, discuss the issues you explored in this booklet with your health worker. This will really help you to make changes in your sex life now, to stay safe in the future.



When knowing the facts isn't enough!



Everyone knows that 'smoking kills' ... yet if you're a smoker you'll know it's still hard to give them up. But that doesn't make smokers mad or bad!

Everyone knows that using condoms is the best way to avoid HIVbut this doesn't mean it's any easier to make sure you practice safe sex.

That's because there is more to changing risky sexual behaviour than just knowing the facts!

If we know what's going on in our head during sex, we can help understand why we take the risks we take, and be better able to avoid taking risks in the future.

A recent QLD study has found that generally gay men do not disclose their HIV status when having unprotected anal sex with casual partners.

Many of these men also reported having unprotected anal sex with their regular partners.

Grant's story

When I was 20 I hit the city & partied hard. I just trusted that guys I had sex with would tell me if they were HIV positive. Big mistake! Within a year I found out I was HIV positive. That was 10 years ago. Since then I've been on treatments but I had problems trying to get my meds right and have been hospitalised twice & was really sick & scared. My family found out I was HIV positive & half of them refuse to talk to me now. I got back on track and thought I'd go on a holiday to the USA. I've just found out that entry into the USA is generally barred for HIV positive people!!

Being safe all the time can be difficult

Everyone makes different decisions about what is safe 'enough' for them. It's your choice – it's your body. So it's up to you to decide what your safe sex rules are.

If you're going to avoid HIV and stay safe, you need to know – 'what is safe' - 'what is risky' – and 'what is safe enough' for you.

Where are you at right now? (Tick one)

- I don't really know what's safe or risky
- I know what is safe or risky
- I know what risks I do & don't want to take

If you are confused about what is safe or risky sex, talking to someone who knows will help. Page 18 lists places to get the facts.

What safe sex rules have you been trying to stick to?

How often have you been breaking your safe sex rules? (circle one)

Daily Weekly Fortnightly Monthly Yearly Rarely Never

How important is it to you to stay HIV negative? (circle one)

Very important Not at all Haven't thought about it



JOE'S STORY [part one]

Joe repeatedly did things in the 'heat of the moment' that he regretted in 'the cold light of day'.

'I love sex. And I've had a lot of it. I've also had a lot of risky sex. I just get carried away, caught up in the moment and I love every minute of it.

But it worries me. It started to worry me so much I went for an HIV test. I was lucky.

But then I'd just get carried away again and I was back to square one. I meant to stay safe and I'd go out thinking I'll be OK, but then it all goes out of your head and I was going at it until I'd wake up and think 'Oh Shit!'

I knew people with HIV and I knew I didn't want that, but I felt like I was out of control. I knew I wasn't a bad person, but I didn't want to tell anyone what I was doing.

In the cold light of day I'd look back and remember things I'd said to myself in the heat of the moment, things I knew weren't right: - "It'll be OK. It won't matter this time. I can tell he isn't infected. He won't cum inside me. I won't cum inside him" and stuff like that. And that was it -back to square one again!"

Your story!

Understand the past to avoid risk in the future.

It's not easy thinking about risks you've taken in the past, however by taking the time to explore past risky sex and the situations which led up to them, you will be better equipped to cope with high risk situations in the future.

Describe how things went the last time you had sex that left you worried about HIV:

What was the place?

What was the day / time?

Who were you with / situation?

Where did you have sex?

What were you thinking or feeling leading up to sex?

What did you tell yourself (hot thoughts) to justify taking risks during sex?

What were your thoughts the next morning (in the 'cold light of day')?

How long after sex did you start worrying about HIV?

How long before you decided to have a test?

Why we take risks we'd rather avoid

In the heat of the moment it's easy to get carried away and do things we regret in the cold light of day.

When we're fired up with love or lust or feeling uninhibited or empowered by drugs & alcohol, 'hot thoughts' can pop into our head & push aside our safe sex rules.

To feel ok about taking risks during sex, we develop a set of beliefs or 'self justifications' about ourselves or other people. For example we can tell ourselves (& believe) 'I won't get HIV' or 'He'd tell me if he had HIV'.

Taking risks during sex can also be the result of feeling bad about ourselves, feeling unconfident, unassertive, lonely or depressed.

By recognising what's going on in your head and motivating you to act as you do in the heat of the moment, you will have a better chance of sticking to your safe sex rules and avoiding HIV.

Nobody wants HIV – the pills, the illness, the worry, the discrimination!

Take this quiz –

What's motivating you to take risks in your sex life you'd rather not take?

My 'hot thoughts' in the heat of the moment

- yes
- no
- sometimes

My beliefs or 'self justifications'

- yes
- no
- sometimes

My drug / alcohol use

- yes
- no
- sometimes

My lack of assertiveness / confidence

- yes
- no
- sometimes

I feel lonely / depressed / anxious

- yes
- no
- sometimes

Other _____

Hot sex / 'hot thoughts'

Here are some typical 'hot thoughts' which can pop into your head in the heat of the moment and result in you taking risks during sex.

Do any of these sound familiar?




- > You only live once – taking a risk is part of life
- > He looks so healthy / clean, he can't be infected
- > This guy looks so young, he can't be infected
- > Most of the time I'm careful – it's only human to break out occasionally
- > I won't fuck without a condom after this last time
- > We have been faithful for a long time without symptoms so it'll probably be OK
- > Being in love is about trust. Love will protect us
- > I'm fed up with thinking about HIV. I refuse to think about HIV right now

- > He's willing to fuck without a condom so he can't be positive
- > I'm sure this guy isn't infected – I can just tell
- > This guy seems intelligent, so I'm sure he's been careful
- > I'll have one last fling and then do safe sex
- > It'll be safe to fuck without condoms, as long as he doesn't cum inside
- > This guy seems such a nice person he can't be infected
- > I've been very good since HIV. I deserve to fuck without a condom
- > He doesn't use the scene much/ he's from the country/he's bisexual/ he hates the scene – so he's probably not infected

Are your 'hot thoughts' putting you at risk?

Think about risky sex you've had recently
- what 'hot thoughts' did you use?

A worksheet for reflection on risky sex. It features a central vertical column of four black and white photographs, each enclosed in a rounded rectangular frame with small circles at the corners. To the left and right of this central column are two vertical columns of four empty, rounded rectangular frames, each with a small circle at the top-left corner, intended for handwritten notes.



You know you need to change when ...
there is a difference between ...

... **what you want** ...

& what you're doing .

Hot thoughts

Wanting
to stay HIV
negative

Ending up with HIV?

Pros & cons of change

When considering any change – especially changes that affect our sex life- we have a list of pros & cons in our head – like a ‘mental balance sheet’ of our reasons ‘for’ & ‘against’ committing to that change.

For you, what are the pros & cons of making the changes required to reduce your risk of ending up with HIV – be honest with yourself!

Pros	Cons

There is no cure for HIV!

Change isn't easy!

Everyone goes through a number of stages when they try to make changes - regardless of what the change is!

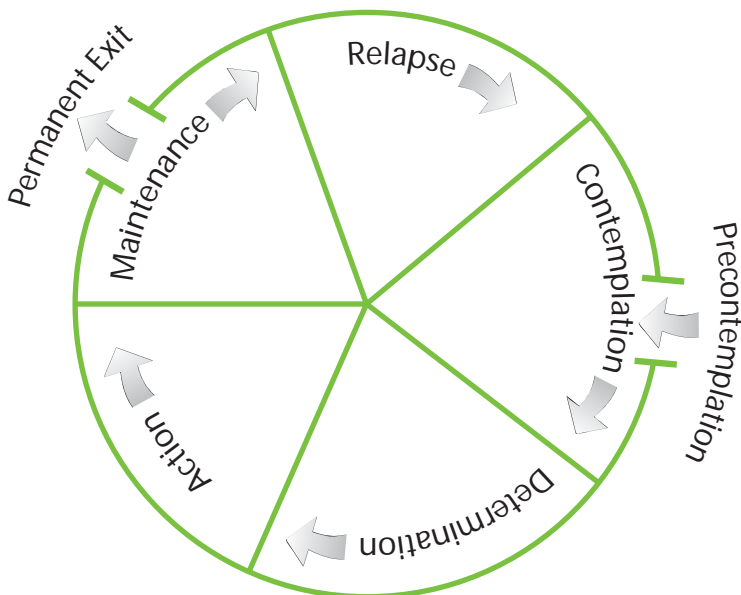
Think about how hard it's been to change old habits in the past – eg getting fit, giving up smoking, saving money, drinking less alcohol.

There are so many factors which impact on changing our behaviour patterns - such as our thoughts, feelings, and motivations. So it's not easy for us to make change especially to our sex life.

Below are the 'stages of change' which everyone who decides to change goes through. People change at different rates and some go around the wheel of change a few times before permanent change happens.

Even when you 'relapse' this is just a setback and doesn't mean failure or that you should give up. You need to hang in there and stay committed to making the changes if you want to avoid getting HIV!

Stages of Change



Where are you on the wheel of change?

If you want to stay safe and avoid HIV, you need to know where you're at in the stages of change so you can decide what the next steps are, and what help you might need to make the changes.

Which of the following stages of change best describes where you're at now?

- I'm at 'pre-contemplator' stage
*I don't think about or worry about HIV or safe sex.
I have unsafe sex & don't have safe sex rules.
HIV is not really relevant to me.*
- I'm at 'contemplation stage'
*I think about HIV and know I should take less risks.
I don't want to get HIV - but making changes would be difficult.
I'm in two minds – I don't want to give up 'risky' sex.*
- I'm at 'determination stage'
*I am ready to commit to change – but I haven't done it yet.
I know what my safe sex rules are.
I have made a plan to follow in risky situations – not tested yet.
I have sought help from a peer / professional to make changes.*
- I'm at 'action stage'
*I have stuck to my safe sex rules in risky situations.
I /others have noticed a change in my sexual practices.
I prepare myself mentally to cope with high risk situations.*
- I'm at 'maintenance stage'
*I consistently stick to my safe sex rules.
I have strategies to cope with high risk situations.*
- I have relapsed (had a setback)
*I have stuck to safe sex rules in the past but maintaining change is difficult.
I face situations which test me – I need some help with this.
I need to go back to my health worker for support.*

RELAPSE IS A SETBACK & DOES NOT MEAN 'FAILURE'!

Challenge yourself to make changes!

So far we've looked at how things have been in the past:

- Recognising your risky situations;
- Exploring what's happening in your head that lead you to take risks;
- Understanding where you're at in the stages of change.

The challenge now is making changes so you stay safe & don't end up with HIV. The changes you make are your choice, but challenging yourself now could save you a lot of stress & trouble later.

Write down the main changes you need to make – be as specific as you can:

Challenging my 'hot thoughts' in the heat of the moment

Challenging my 'self justifications' or beliefs about myself / others

Managing my feelings / emotions

Improving my self esteem

Improving my social skills / assertiveness skills

Managing my drugs / alcohol use

Coping with depression / anxiety

Coping with specific high risk situations

Challenging your 'hot thoughts'

Recognising that there is a difference between what we want and what our thoughts & feelings are leading us into doing is important for making changes.



Here are some of the ways that other guys have dealt with their thoughts & feelings:

- 'I don't beat myself up if I hear myself using a hot-thought or 'self-justification'. Instead I say 'well done' for seeing it.'
- 'After I read about how what goes on in your head effects your behaviour I still slipped up – but that's when I really saw how I my thoughts led me to slip up.'
- 'When I'm feeling really horny is when I slip-up, so I let myself get excited, but I still keep an eye on what I'm thinking.'
- 'You think you only slip up when you're horny, but then you realise you can slip up when your feeling bad about yourself. I look out for the situations where that happens.'
- 'I look back at my sex life all the time now. I see how I take more risks in some situations and depending on my mood.'
- 'It's easier going to the clinic and talking to the health care worker now I know they won't judge me.'
- 'I keep condoms and lube in my bag and in my wallet so that I always have them with me.'
- 'As soon as it's obvious what's going to happen or if sex gets mentioned – I grin and say: 'Great! I've got condoms.' It makes me sound really keen and it mentions condoms right from the start.'
- 'I keep to my own rules. I know there's still some risk, but it's my choice and I can stick to my own rules.'

There are lots of ways to deal with your thoughts, feelings, and risky situations - everyone will have their own individual ideas.

JOE'S STORY [part two]

"I kept telling myself that I was bound to be infected. I don't know how many of the guys I had sex with had HIV. I'd been lucky so far, but going for a test was really stressful and I couldn't work out why I kept taking risks.

But the last time I was at the clinic the health worker asked if I wanted to talk about anything. I didn't know how to start at first, but the more we talked about it, the more I could see that I was allowing myself to have risky sex.

Without even being aware of it, I was using these hot-thoughts to allow myself to take risks. I started to see how I could recognise what I was doing and stop using hot-thoughts. It was really useful to talk about it".

Make a commitment to yourself!

Write down your commitment to yourself. It sounds simple but it can make a difference.

The safe sex rules I want to stick to now are: _____

I will seek assistance from: _____

Safe sex isn't something you get sorted over-night. Everyone makes mistakes and, but by thinking about those slip-ups, you can learn from them.

Almost everyone who uses this booklet will need to read it again to keep the ideas fresh in their mind. One slip-up doesn't necessarily mean all is lost, so don't give up.

By learning from your slip-ups you can avoid them in the future. Talking things through with another person can really help to make new ideas stick. It can take a while to make changes stick, but you've come this far so, you're already on the way to making real change.

Where do you go from here?

Hopefully this booklet has helped you become aware of several things:

- You are in control of your sex life.
- Staying safe might have been difficult, but having had risky sex in the past doesn't necessarily mean everything is already lost.
- Your thoughts and feelings about yourself & others can leave you vulnerable.
- You can be vulnerable in the heat of the moment.
- Hot-thoughts can be powerful and dangerous & can tip the scale from meaning to stay HIV negative into taking risks that you don't want.
- By thinking about what's gone on in your head in past situations, you can recognise and better manage risky situations in the future.

Think about what you want to do next.

- Change doesn't happen overnight – you have to think about what you want, what you've done in the past, and what you will do next time.
- Talking things through with someone can help you plan what will make a difference in the future.

It's your choice; we're not the sex police. Just as long as you know there are services to support you if you want to avoid HIV.

You don't have to do this on your own.

Working through this booklet on your own can help you see the changes you need to make, but talking with someone else improves your chances of making changes that stick.

You don't need to do this on your own!

There are places you can speak to someone, either on the phone, face-to-face or even by email and on the Internet:

- For details of your local sexual health clinic call **13 43 25**
- The Alcohol and Drug Information Service is a free telephone counselling service. Call **1800 177 833**
- You can speak to someone at QAHC, call the Men's Sexual Health Line on **1800 155 141**
- You can also email any questions to **info@qahc.org.au**
- If you want to explore issues in more depth, there are short courses of free and low-cost counselling available:
 - > Phone counselling GLWA (7pm – 10pm daily) - **1800 184 527**.
 - > Sexual health clinics - call **13 43 25** for details of your nearest clinic.
 - > Salvation Army counselling – call **13Salvos(137258)** for your nearest location.
 - > Relationships Australia counselling service – call **1300 364 277** for your nearest location.
 - > Family Planning Queensland – call **3250 0240** for your nearest location.
 - > For further counselling options call **1800 155 141**.



Information Resources on the internet:

Info on QAHC- www.qahc.org.au

Info on men's sexual health - www.men.org.au

Info on condoms and lubricant - www.condoms.org.au

Info on STIs and testing - www.gotest.org.au

Info on HIV status – www.thinkagain.com.au

Info on party drugs - www.afao.org.au/parties



This booklet was given to you by: