

Physical wellbeing for sex workers

While it's vital for everyone to maintain a healthy state of physical well being, it is especially important for sex workers.

The level of physical intimacy between sex workers and their clientele far exceeds that of any other occupation, putting sex workers at a far greater risk of contracting STIs and other communicable diseases.

This fact sheet provides tips on how to maintain your physical wellbeing, and includes topics such as keeping your immune system strong, looking after your skin, protecting your oral health, visiting your GP and looking after yourself.

Be responsible for your health

Apart from maintaining regular sexual health checks, sex workers must be responsible for their own overall physical health. Knowing when not to work is crucial for sex workers and could mean the difference between life and death.

Keep your immune system strong

Our immune system helps our bodies fight off infection caused by bacteria we come into contact with. It is very important for sex workers to keep this mighty defence mechanism at optimum levels.

To keep your immune system strong:

- Ensure you get regular exercise, enough sleep and a healthy diet.
- Consider taking monitored vitamin supplements to boost your immune system's efficiency. Herbs such as echinacea, ginseng and garlic are known to boost the immune system.
- Try to avoid excessive intake of immune depleting substances such as caffeine, alcohol and nicotine.

- Avoid high levels of stress as this can have major effects on the immune system. Stress and lack of rest can impair your immune system and make you more vulnerable to infections. Relieve stress through activities such as meditation, yoga, walking, swimming, even macramé and laughing.

A healthy body and a healthy mind, make a healthy immune system. Even a half-tired body means a half-tired immune system. Don't take a risk - take a rest.

Look after your skin

Many sex workers have constant direct skin contact with their clientele. This can (and usually does) involve a lot of friction which can cause microscopic breaks in the skin's outer layer. These skin breaks enable the possible transmission of various infections.

It is not uncommon for many sex workers to develop a hygiene obsession, involving excessive rubbing and scrubbing with often harsh soaps. This can lead to many unwanted, unfavourable skin conditions which make working difficult and unpleasant.

Due to these issues, it is highly recommended that sex workers follow "best practice" when it comes to skin care.

Use a gentle moisturising cleanser rich in vegetable oils, and be sure to moisturise after every shower/bath. Sorbolene or Aqueous creams are suitable and affordable moisturisers, as is Aloe Vera, which works to form a protective layer on the skin. After showering and while the body is slightly wet, apply moisturiser in a light, gentle polishing manner all over the body, including the face. This should take less than a minute. Not only will you have beautiful skin, you may also discover that you never need to buy expensive moisturisers again.

Fact sheet for sex workers

Drinking lots of fresh water will also help maintain healthy, glowing skin.

Protect your oral health

As many infections can be passed on through bleeding gums or cuts/sores in the mouth, healthy gums can be as crucial as condoms for sex workers.

To protect your oral health:

- Visit your dentist regularly.
- Floss and brush after meals.
- Do not brush or floss immediately prior to receiving clients as this can aggravate the gums and cause bleeding. Gargle with water if necessary and keep some mints handy.

Visit your GP

It is strongly recommended that sex workers find a GP who they can be honest with. Your doctor should know you are working in the sex industry, particularly if you live in a remote area and do not have access to a sexual health clinic.

Not only do sex workers require more thorough and regular STI testing, this will also help your GP determine the most suitable treatment.

Your GP will be familiar with common infections that can be easily transmitted by close contact and kissing (eg. glandular fever, ringworm, tinea and other viral illnesses such as the flu). You may like to consider flu vaccinations to keep your immune system strong.

Your GP can also be a valuable referral source to many other specialist services.

Look after yourself

- Ensure you lead a balanced lifestyle - work, rest, play.
- Establish boundaries between your personal and professional life. Try not to become too involved with clients.

- Working in the sex industry can be both physical and mentally draining. Make sure you take time off when you're feeling burnt out. Good financial management allows you to take time off whenever you need it.
- Talk about issues with someone you trust before they become big problems.
- Don't become a slave to your phone or workplace.
- Find constructive ways to spend time in between clients. Reading a book or doing exercises like sit-ups or yoga are good ways to pass time.
- Nurture yourself and give to yourself, so that you have something to give others.