

Strategies for with effectiveness is low or uncertain *The effectiveness of these strategies is low or uncertain and often depends on other factors. Combining them with other strategies is recommended.*



MAKING AN AGREEMENT WITH YOUR REGULAR PARTNER (NEGOTIATED SAFETY)

Adapting the prevention strategies that would normally be used, once each partner has been tested and you have come to an agreement regarding sexual activities and the use of prevention strategies outside the relationship

Description

- Negotiated safety involves no longer using condoms in a regular/stable relationship after tests have confirmed that both partners have the same HIV status (seroconcordance). This strategy is also used along with an agreement on sex outside of the relationship. For example:¹
 - Not having other sexual partners (monogamy).
 - Possibly having sex, but not vaginal/frontal or anal sex.
 - Possibly having vaginal/frontal or anal sex as long as condoms are used.
- Certain criteria must be taken into account when deciding to no longer condoms with a partner:¹
 - It must be a regular relationship.
 - All partners must have been tested for HIV and other STIs, taking into account the window period (waiting to get tested until 3 months after the last time you had sex with anyone else but your regular partner).
 - The partners must come to a clear agreement about not using condoms in the relationship.
 - The partners must come to a clear agreement about the extent and type of sexual contact with other people and the prevention strategies to be used with them.

Effectiveness

- In one study, the number of HIV infections among men practicing negotiated safety was similar to the number among men who always used condoms.²
- This strategy is not without risk and its effectiveness depends for the most part on whether each partner respects the agreement.¹
- One study reported that 29% of participants who said they practiced negotiated safety had not respected their agreement in the 3 months prior to the survey. Among these participants, 64% reported having anal sex without a condom.³
- Another study reported that close to one third of participants did not respect their agreement over a 12-month period. The main reasons were wanting sexual contact, being propositioned, feeling attracted to another person, not being able to control impulses, or not being sexually satisfied. Among these participants, half of them had informed their partners.⁴
- Use of condoms outside a relationship is influenced by attitudes within the couple about condom use.¹

Acceptability

- In the *Mobilise!* survey among men who have sex with men in Montreal, most (91%) respondents knew about negotiated safety as a risk reduction strategy.⁵
- In a survey of 76 HIV-negative men in a relationship with an HIV-negative partner, 50% said they practiced negotiated safety.³
- Advantages of negotiated safety:
 - Allows you to have sex without a condom with a stable partner.⁶
 - Promotes communication, honesty, and commitment.⁶
 - Does not require use of a service.

- No costs are involved.
- Disadvantages of negotiated safety:
 - Requires communication and trust between partners.⁶
 - Requires that you know both your own and your partner's HIV status and can confirm the accuracy of this information (taking into account the window period and recent risk-taking).
 - Its effectiveness depends whether the agreement is upheld⁶:
 - May be difficult to carry out on a day-to-day basis.
 - You have no control over whether your partner respects the agreement.
 - If sex happens outside the relationship:
 - Frequent HIV testing is required.
 - This strategy does not protect against other STIs.

References

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