

Contraceptives: Brits turn a blind eye to STIs

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With Sexual Health Week now in full flow, new research from MINTEL can reveal that attitudes to sexual health are still alarmingly relaxed in Britain today. Indeed, just one in three adults (33%) say they always use a condom with a new partner, a time when it really is important to take precautions. Surprisingly, one in 10 Brits (11%) are still too embarrassed to buy condoms- a figure that is just as high amongst older adults as it is amongst Britain's teenagers.

The research also shows that 31% of adults don't use a condom because they trust that their partner does not have a sexually transmitted infection (STI), while the same proportion (32%) simply don't think they are at risk of catching an STI at all.

"It is clear that many Brits have become very blasé about safe sex. Messages about sexual health and protecting against both pregnancy and STIs are not getting through. Communications are either not being clearly delivered, or more dangerously, not being listened to," comments Katy Child, senior market analyst at MINTEL.

What is more, 33% stop using a condom when in a long term relationship. They assume that a committed relationship reduces the risk of an STI but this is only true if both partners have been tested and cleared of STIs.

"There is still a taboo surrounding STIs that needs addressing. People need to be encouraged to take responsibility for protecting themselves and to speak more openly about these issues with their partners. Using condoms and testing for STIs needs to become the norm and not something to be embarrassed about," says Katy Child.

According to the figures from MINTEL, condom sales and distribution (through shops and the NHS) have remained relatively static since 2003, at around 190 million condoms a year.

The Shirley Valentine Effect

Many sexual health awareness campaigns target teenagers and young adults. But today it seems that Britain's over 45s could do with a crash course in these matters. Rising divorce rates and vastly changing attitudes mean that there is now a large number of people of this age getting back on the dating scene. Messaging needs to be as relevant to this age group as it is to the younger generation.

"People coming out of long-term relationships and looking for love again may be unaware of the risks of contracting STIs. Condoms that are marketed specifically to divorcees might just strike a chord," explains Katy Child.

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