

How was it for you?

Last year nearly 10,000 of you took part in the **Gay Men's Sex Survey**. Now we publish for the first time how UK gay men feel about their sex lives.

Understanding what's stopping us from having the sex we want can help us take more control of our sex lives. This is an important step in us enjoying greater sexual well-being and, in turn, reducing the spread of HIV.

How satisfied are you with the sex you're getting (or not getting!)? Here we look at the findings and offer pointers on what to do about things that get between you and a better sex life.

Man to man happy with your sex life?

We asked over **nine and a half thousand** men who'd had sex with another man in the previous year: *are you happy with your sex life?*
Here's the answer:



Top 12 reasons for NOT being happy

1	I want a regular relationship with someone	55%*
2	I'm not as sexually confident as I want to be	25%
3	I'd like more sex with the man/men I have sex with	24%
4	I'd like more sexual partners	23.5%
5	I'm not having any sex	13%
6	I worry too much about HIV and safer sex	11%
7	I have problems getting or keeping a hard-on	10%
8	I have problems in my relationship	10%
9	I worry about having too many sexual partners	10%
10	My sex drive is too low	9.5%
11	My health problems interfere with sex	8%
12	My partner's health problems interfere with sex	3%
	Other reasons	4%**

* figures refer to the men not happy

** boredom with sex, long distance relationships, getting over relationship break-up, feeling unattractive, not fancying or enjoying sex with partner, unhappy with the gay scene, orgasm problems, wanting more intimacy, stress/depression affecting sex life, drugs and alcohol affecting sex life, no time to meet people, past sexual abuse affecting sex life, too high sex drive, getting sexually transmitted infections, communication problems and problems with sexuality and other people knowing I'm gay.

it's good to talk

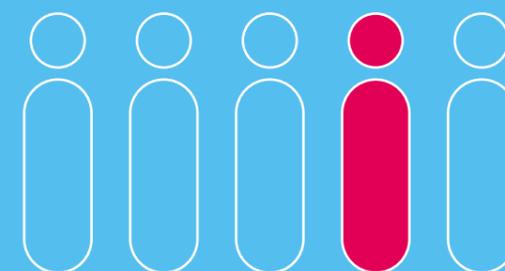
Matthew Keogh of Terrence Higgins Trust Birmingham talks about one service on offer to men in the West Midlands unhappy with their sex lives

"We run a free one-to-one gay-staffed advice service where men can talk through anything on their mind about their sex lives and relationships, whatever their HIV status. We don't like to call it 'counselling' as this puts some men off. We offer men the chance to talk in confidence about a range of personal, sexual and relationship issues, either on their own or with a partner.

Some men opt for a one-off advice or information session, while others may end up having several sessions to give them enough time to discuss what it is that concerns them. Each session is by appointment and lasts around an hour. We can also help men find specialist services if it becomes clear this is what's needed."

For more details or to fix an appointment you can call Monday-Friday (office hours) on:
Birmingham 0121 694 6440
Coventry 024 7622 9292

These face-to-face sessions are also available at Terrence Higgins Trust offices in **Brighton, Bristol, London, Oxford** and **Swansea**. Among places offering similar face-to-face help are, **in London**, the Healthy Gay Living Centre and PACE and **outside London**, Yorkshire MESMAC and Lesbian & Gay Foundation (details on back page).



14% of Britons (1 in 5 of single people) have talked their problems over with a counsellor/therapist - **68% said it helped***

*source: Britain Uncovered, 2001



Getting it enough is enough?

Nearly **1 in 4** of the men unhappy with their sex life felt they weren't getting as much sex as they wanted. But for **1 in 10** the problem was *too many* sexual partners.

Sex drive

The cause of low sex drive could be physical and some medications can cause it.

Speaking to your GP

could be useful.

1 in 5 men had problems with a sex drive they felt was either **too high** or **too low**

Sex drive can be influenced by **depression** or **stress**

If the problem has no physical cause but if it's to do with things going on in your mind **psychosexual counselling** can help*

* This is available free through many GUM clinics or Terrence Higgins Trust's counselling service. Your GP can refer you to other local services, although they may have a waiting list.

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So many men ... Some men feel a need to **'keep up'** with what they believe gay men around them are doing. If that rings a bell, ask yourself:

1. How much sex is **enough** for me?
2. Am I buying into the myth that everyone's having **lots more** (and better) sex than me?
3. Why am I having the amount of sex I am? How else might I get these **needs** met?

If you're concerned about what you're doing, these can help:

● A psychosexual therapist ● Sex Addicts Anonymous (details on back page)

Lacking sexual confidence?

Things worth considering include...

Avoiding mixing sex with situations that make you **anxious**

Having sex only when you feel **relaxed**

Lack of sexual confidence can stem from insecurities around **relating** to other gay men

Remember: you don't need to be liked by everyone - and everyone doesn't need to be liked by you

A counsellor trained in **sex issues** (sex therapist) can help

There are workshops on **building** your cruising skills and sexual confidence

Boys to men ageing

Younger men have it easy? Not true. Men in their **20's** and **30's** are happiest with their sex lives, with fewer problems. But men under **20** are most likely to want a regular relationship and to worry about HIV and safer sex. And they're the most likely to be going without sex - although many others in this age group report concern about having *too many* sexual partners.

Younger guys are also more likely to lack sexual confidence and want more sexual partners. But they have fewer problems with low sex drive or poor health interfering with sex.

As men hit their **40's** and older the following problems are reported more;

- **Poor health interfering with sex**
- **Low sex drive**
- **Erection problems**
- **Wanting more sex**
- **And, to a lesser degree, lacking self-confidence**

The good news: as men get older they worry less both about how many sexual partners they have and about going without sex.

Older, wiser, sexier

Run by volunteers from the **Lesbian & Gay Foundation** in **Manchester**, the **40plus Group** is a place older men in the North West can meet socially. The weekly meetings give gay and bisexual men the chance to look at issues affecting their lives. Information and support are available on the men's health, legal, financial or work-related needs.

The social side is a key element to the group's success. Alongside the scheduled leisure activities are opportunities for men to add their own experiences and histories to projects on local gay heritage.

The group's programmed sessions reflect the place sex continues to play in the lives of men over 40. Loneliness, friendships, sexual health, relationships and ageing are subjects covered.

To find out more about the group - or to get advice on setting one up if a similar group doesn't exist where you live - contact the **Lesbian & Gay Foundation** (details on back page)

10% of all men unhappy with their sex life gave this as a problem.

Studies show **10%** of cases of erection difficulties are due to physical problems, **10%** to psychological problems and **80%** a combination of the two.

Erection problems:
getting a grip

These things can help:

- **Viagra®** (it should never be used with poppers; Viagra® is also **potentially dangerous** for men with heart problems, high blood pressure or on HIV treatments. **Consult a doctor before taking Viagra®**)
- Vacuum pumps (they **improve** blood flow)
- Physical **techniques**
- **The Impotence Association** (details at the end of this feature)
- Men who **exercise regularly** suffer less impotence
- Erection problems can indicate **high blood pressure, diabetes, stress, depression** or **hormonal problems**
- With help, tackling erection problems has a **high success rate**

Relationships twice as nice?

Figures show **60%** of gay men have a regular partner and **40%** don't*. Men in both groups report problems. For over half of men saying they were dissatisfied with their sex life, wanting a regular relationship was a problem. This was more common among the youngest men and the older men. **4 out of 10 single men** cited wanting a relationship as a reason for not being happy with their sex life.

Other issues more common for single men included;

- **Lack of sexual confidence**
- **Wanting more sexual partners**
- **Not getting any sex**
- **Worrying about HIV and safer sex**
- **Worrying about having too many sexual partners**

*Gay Men's Sex Survey 1998

5 point plan for finding a man!

- **Ask yourself what it is about a relationship you find so attractive - and why**
- **Be clear what you want from a partner**
- **Looking in the wrong places? Check out new places - away from the gay scene, e.g. gay interest/sports/voluntary groups**
- **Try personal ads or give gay dating agencies a go**
- **Live in London? Check out the 'Looking for Mr Right' workshops run by PACE (see back page)**

Although **men in relationships** were on average a lot happier with their sex lives, they weren't problem-free. Some reported lack of sexual confidence, wanting more sex than they were getting, and some reported problems in their relationships, including wanting sex with other men.

It takes two to tango The London-based **Healthy Gay Living Centre** is one organisation offering the chance for couples to talk over their problems. **Anthony Clarke of HGLC explains what couples can get out of this kind of service.**

"Men in relationships face a new set of problems. Few of us can model our relationships with men on successful gay relationships we witnessed as children. We've usually experienced heterosexual relationships; within the family, school or peer groups. We may mirror these in our adult gay relationships - or seek out different patterns. The lack of recognition of our relationships - from the law, religion and society - can cause severe problems with being confident and assertive.

Couple counselling can be a really useful focus for each partner to understand each other's needs and ways of behaving. This can lead to better trust, communication and negotiation around things like sexual problems or open versus monogamous relationships. Sometimes just a one-off session can be enough to move on, having accepted and acknowledged where we are now as a couple and where we want to go."

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Kissing with confidence

Not feeling able to show affection in public was seen as a major issue for men surveyed, but especially if you have a regular partner. Over half of all men said in the last year they'd avoided showing affection in public to someone of the same sex, a figure constant across the country. Most of these men feared physical attack and/or verbal abuse; 7% feared trouble with the police.

Sunil Web designer

"My boyfriend is a bit self-conscious outside of gay places and is quite reticent anyway. I used to go to kiss him in public but he'd back away! I've got used to this, and don't push it. Partly he doesn't want to be 'obviously' gay or attract attention in case of violence.

Living in Melbourne things seemed more relaxed. You saw more gay people showing affection - across the city, not just 'gay' areas. As a visitor in another country away from 'home' I felt more able to do it myself. I've noticed since coming back and coming out to my parents I feel more open too.

Seeing others do it, say, on Old Compton St, part of me feels they're making a statement because that's a 'gay street'. I feel a bit envious they're doing it (as I'd like to). I do feel it's lovely to see, but there's the feeling of 'I hope they'll be safe'. I guess reality is very different from what I think it should be. Will things change? I hope to see it one day."

Hayden Information officer

"It depends on my mood and where I am. If I'm feeling bold I'll kiss a friend on both cheeks. It can feel OK in some parts of town, but less so where I live. Showing affection's important to me but I balance this with my need for safety. Sometimes a huge nightmare goes before my eyes, a cloud of fear, as I remember experiences with homophobia from the past.

I've got dyke friends who would go out of their way to hold hands in public, etc. - for them it's a political thing. With them I'd feel pure terror when they did it! But I really admire their bravery.

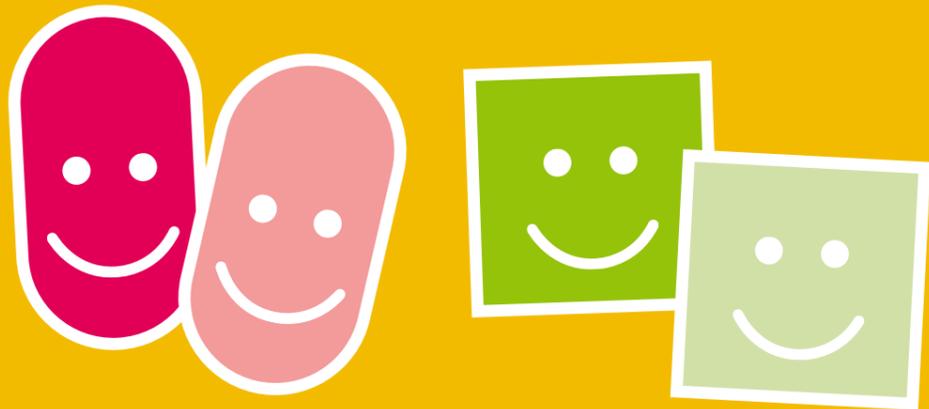
As I get older and more rooted in my sexuality I get less bothered about people's reactions. I must admit when I see straight couples all lovey dovey in public I can get all 'bitter and twisted'! They don't think twice about being affectionate. How could something so innocent be a problem if we do it?"

Plus points men with HIV

On the whole, if you've tested HIV positive **you're likely to be as happy** with your sex life as men who haven't. But you're more likely to report **specific problems such as;**

- Worrying about HIV and safer sex
- Health problems (your own or your partner's) affecting your sex lives
- Low sex drive
- Erection difficulties
- And, to a lesser extent, a lack of sexual confidence

On top of the above, if you're **HIV positive** and in a relationship with a man who isn't, you're more likely to not be getting any sex or want more sex with your partner or with other men.



Whether HIV negative or HIV positive, being in a relationship with someone of the same HIV status led to fewer problems.

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Jack Summerside from Terrence Higgins Trust's Living Well With HIV team has encouraging words for men with HIV learning to live - and love - post diagnosis.

"Sometimes you get the impression if you have HIV you shouldn't really carry on having a sex life or expect happy relationships. But these are basic human needs everyone should be able to have met - we aim to support people living with HIV in that.

Being HIV positive can make sex and intimacy seem difficult, sometimes impossible. Following your diagnosis, conflicts you had about sex and your sexual feelings long before you became HIV positive may reappear even more strongly. You may find it hard dealing with your concerns about passing HIV on or whether to tell people you have HIV.

There are extra complications and strains once you have HIV, but there's no reason to shut yourself off from vital parts of life, like sex and relationships. You may need support before it feels easier - people out there can help. There is one-to-one advice or counselling, workshops and leaflets to help those of us with HIV enjoy the better sex and relationships we deserve."



This leaflet for gay men with HIV about sex and relationships is available free from the Terrence Higgins Trust Helpline (details on back page).

What is the Gay Men's Sex Survey? Since **1997** the annual Gay Men's Sex Survey has been 'probing' men who've had sex with another man in the previous twelve months. This is done through men filling in questionnaires at gay festivals or by returning postal questionnaires distributed where gay men meet. It's carried out by **Sigma Research** as part of the **Terrence Higgins Trust** co-ordinated **CHAPS** programme. If you've taken part yourself, you've been part of the world's largest survey of gay men's sex lives. Information you give each year is used in much of the sexual health work aimed at gay men - such as campaigns and services. The information in this feature comes from just one section of the survey.



More on the sex survey For the full results on the **Gay Men's Sex Survey 2000**, from which these findings were taken, please contact **Michael Stephens** at **Sigma Research** on **020 7737 6223**, email michael@sigmaresearch.org.uk or visit www.sigmaresearch.org.uk.

To take part in the **2001** survey please contact **Sigma Research** for a questionnaire or pick up one of these in your local gay venue.

Finding Help

Private (paid for) face-to-face services

British Association for
Counselling and Psychotherapy
0870 443 5252 www.bac.co.uk
(provides details of private therapists nation-wide)

Free face-to-face services

A referral from your GP is usually needed for free NHS services. Here are free services **not** needing a GP's referral:

Terrence Higgins Trust face-to-face services in: **Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Coventry, London, Oxford** and **Swansea**.
Call **020 7835 1495** for details.

Also in ...

London
PACE: 020 7700 1323
Healthy Gay Living Centre:
020 7407 3550

Manchester
Lesbian & Gay Foundation:
0161 235 8035

Yorkshire
Yorkshire MESMAC: 0113 244 4209

National:
National FRIEND 0121 684 1261
(they'll tell you of gay counsellors local to you)

Counsellors in GUM clinics

Useful contacts

Terrence Higgins Trust National Helpline
020 7242 1010 (midday until 10pm daily)

Survivors
020 7613 0808
(support for males who've been sexually assaulted or abused)

Sex Addicts Anonymous
0208 442 0026 (recorded message)

The Impotence Association
020 8767 7791
www.impotence.org.uk

Relate
01788 573 241 www.relate.org.uk
(relationship counselling that includes gay people)

Your local lesbian & gay switchboard
(number in your local phone book)

Useful books
(many feature in Gay Times' book service).

The New Joy of Gay Sex
Dr Charles Silverstein

How to be a Happy Homosexual
Terry Sanderson

Coming Out: a Handbook for Men
Orland Outland

Permanent Partners - Building Gay & Lesbian Relationships That Last
Betty Berzon

Gay Sex - A Manual for Men

Jack Hart
Mr Right Is Out There
Dr Kenneth D George
Gay Spirit Warrior
John R Stowe
Together
Patriic Gayle

Websites

www.embarassingproblems.co.uk
www.relate.org.uk
www.impotence.org.uk

Workshops

Gay organisations run workshops about things such as: **relationships, finding a partner, a sex life with HIV, 'coming out', dealing with gay life, sexual confidence and getting the sex you want.**

These are some of the places running workshops:

London
PACE
Gay Men Fighting AIDS: 020 7738 6872
Healthy Gay Living Centre

Outside London
Yorkshire MESMAC
Manchester's Lesbian & Gay Foundation

They're free and advertised in the gay press. Other organisations more local to you may also run them - your nearest gay switchboard or gay men's project will have details.