



Guide to Sex Positivity

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This package was created by the Healthy U program at the University of Manitoba. Healthy U is a UM student group made up of a team of friendly volunteers who are trained student health educators.

We provide students with validated health information through our health packages and outreach events, online resources, and one-on-one support. Health topics that we provide resources on include mental health, sexual health, physical health, substance use, social and cultural wellness, and finding a balance.

Please reach out to us if you have any questions at:
healthyu@umanitoba.ca

Sex Positivity

Whether you are single, just starting out or in a relationship, it is important to know how to say no, how to ask for what you want and how to make sure your partner is being heard as well.

Before you can become comfortable asking for what you want, you need to be comfortable with who you are. This includes your orientations (romantic, sexual), your sex drive (or lack thereof), and what you are or aren't ready for. Reflect on who you are and what you're looking for. Your boundaries, identity and expectations are important.

People who are sex positive often have the following traits:

- Open to learning more about sex. This includes understanding their own and their partner's body, and the emotional, physical, and psychological aspects of intimacy.
- Understand the importance of safe sex, both for themselves and for their partners.
- Consider sex a potentially healthy part of life and can discuss it without shame or awkwardness.
- Acknowledge that sometimes they don't want to have sex, and that sometimes their partner doesn't want to.
- Accept other people's sexual practices without judgement, as long as everything is consensual and without fear.
- Accepting their own and other people's sexual orientation without judgement.
- 'Sex positive' does NOT mean 'sex mandatory.' Being sex positive also means supporting those who are not sexually active, whether it is yourself or others.



Themes of Sex Positivity

Personal Beliefs

Believing that sex is (or can be) good, as long as no one is harmed. Includes the view that sex must be consensual. Sex positivity also includes feminism, as it recognizes that many women are demeaned when they do not conform to sexual ideals.

Education

Recognizes that age-appropriate education should continue throughout life and should respond to the learner's questions without causing shame or fear. Includes information on healthy relationships, diversity, pleasure, and consent.

Health and Safety

Understanding the importance of access to information and resources, such as STI clinics, abortion, and birth control. Sex positivity has been shown to improve relationships and mental health. Since sex positivity differentiates between healthy sexuality and abuse, a sex-positive environment makes it easier for survivors of trauma to come forward.

Respect for the Individual

This concept focuses on autonomy (every person can make decisions about their own body), abstinence (refraining from sex is a valid option but is not the only one), and self-acceptance (not judging yourself). Sex positivity facilitates acceptance of others and oneself.

Positive Relationship With Others

Being inclusive of others and accepting diversity.



Sex-positive communication

Talking can be hard, but it's super important! Here are some topics you should try to cover, and examples of things you could say so you don't feel as uncomfortable.

Be clear about what you are or aren't okay with.

Make sure you and your partner have a conversation early on about what you're looking for. This can save you a lot of trouble later - you can avoid pressuring or frustrating each other if you know from the start where each other is at.

You: "Hey, I'd just like to know how far you're ready to take this?"

Them: "I'm ready to go all the way."

You: "I'm not quite there yet - I'd like to keep some of my clothes on tonight."

Talk about what you like and don't like

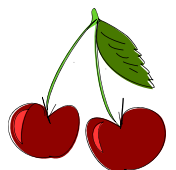
If you trust and respect each other, both of you should be able to tell the other what they like and also what they don't like. Try to check in with your partner and ask if they like something, and don't take it personally if they aren't a fan. Remember: everybody is different, therefore a new partner isn't going to know what you like unless you communicate (no matter how much experience they have). You can show your partner what you like, you can tell them, or you can guide them. Also, remember that what feels good can change over time, so keep communicating!

"Do you like it better like this... or like this?"

"Are you comfortable?"

"Could we try a different angle? This one hurts a little."

"I feel better when you aren't over top of me, at least for now."



Talk about STI testing

Protect yourself! Before engaging in sexual activity with someone, ask about the last time they've been tested. Remember that even if you both have tested negative, it is still safest to use condoms anyway. Ask about previous unprotected sex, as well as sharing needles (for drugs, tattoos, or piercings), as STIs can be transmitted this way as well.

You: "Before we do anything, can I ask when the last time you got tested was?"

Them: "I don't have any STI's, I promise. I think I would know!"

You: "Most STI's don't actually have any symptoms - I'm not going to be comfortable doing anything unless we know for sure. We could go together if you want?"

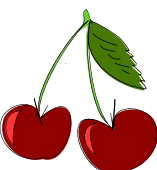
Talk about birth control

Discuss birth control methods with your partner, including what type works best for you and your partner and if any doses have been missed. Be open about your birth control decisions, and consider discussing how costs will be covered.

You: "What have you done for birth control in the past? Are you on anything now?"

Them: "We always just pulled out or used condoms. It's worked so far!"

You: "That's not the most reliable method - I'm good to use condoms every time, but would you consider using a second method, like the pill or an IUS? I could split the cost with you."



Practice Asking for Consent

Asking for consent may feel awkward at first, but it's super important and can be done in a way that makes everyone feel more comfortable, not less. The more you practice, the easier it'll get!

Make a list of things you've either said or would say in the future to ask for consent. Remember that consent is needed for more than just sex - it's needed for kissing, touching, and even holding hands!

| Questions I asked/could ask | How did the person respond and how did I feel? |
|-----------------------------|--|
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Healthy Sexuality

What does it mean to be sexually healthy?

Being sexually healthy means taking care of your physical and emotional health by practicing safer sex and being comfortable with your body, your relationships, and your sexuality.

Can sex be good for you?

When you have a healthy sex life, you can experience physical and emotional benefits. These include better overall health, better sleep, less stress and tension, feelings of relationship satisfaction, improved self-esteem, better fitness, and even a longer life!

How can I have a healthy sex life?

Emotional: Allow yourself to enjoy sexual pleasure if this is your choice, and communicate with confidence. If you feel good about your body, your orientation, and your identity, your sex life will become healthier as well.

Physical: protect yourself from STI's and unplanned pregnancy by using condoms (every time, right from the beginning). Make sure you check the expiry date, and only use with either silicone- or water-based lubricant (oil-based products like vaseline can break the condom). Don't double up on condoms - two condoms rubbing together can create friction and cause them to tear. Change out your condoms every time you switch to a different hole, and use condoms on your sex toys if you have. Even if you have been consistently practicing safer sex, make sure you are still getting tested for STI's regularly, just in case.



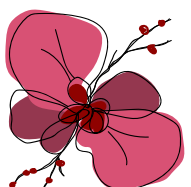
Know your body

Most people have learned about their anatomy at some point in life. If you haven't, Planned Parenthood has a great webpage you can visit:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/health-and-wellness/sexual-and-reproductive-anatomy>

When you're ready, it's a good idea to get to know your body - if you can't see, you can grab a mirror and take a look. It might feel embarrassing at the time, but there's nothing to be ashamed of. After all, it's your body. If you're comfortable, try exploring with your hands (make sure you wash them with unscented soap first to avoid infections or sensitivity reactions).

Many people find that masturbation helps them get more familiar with their own body and what it likes or dislikes. It can improve body image and self esteem, and helps with your confidence. It's also the safest form of sex! If this is something you're thinking about trying, remember to take it slow and listen to your body.



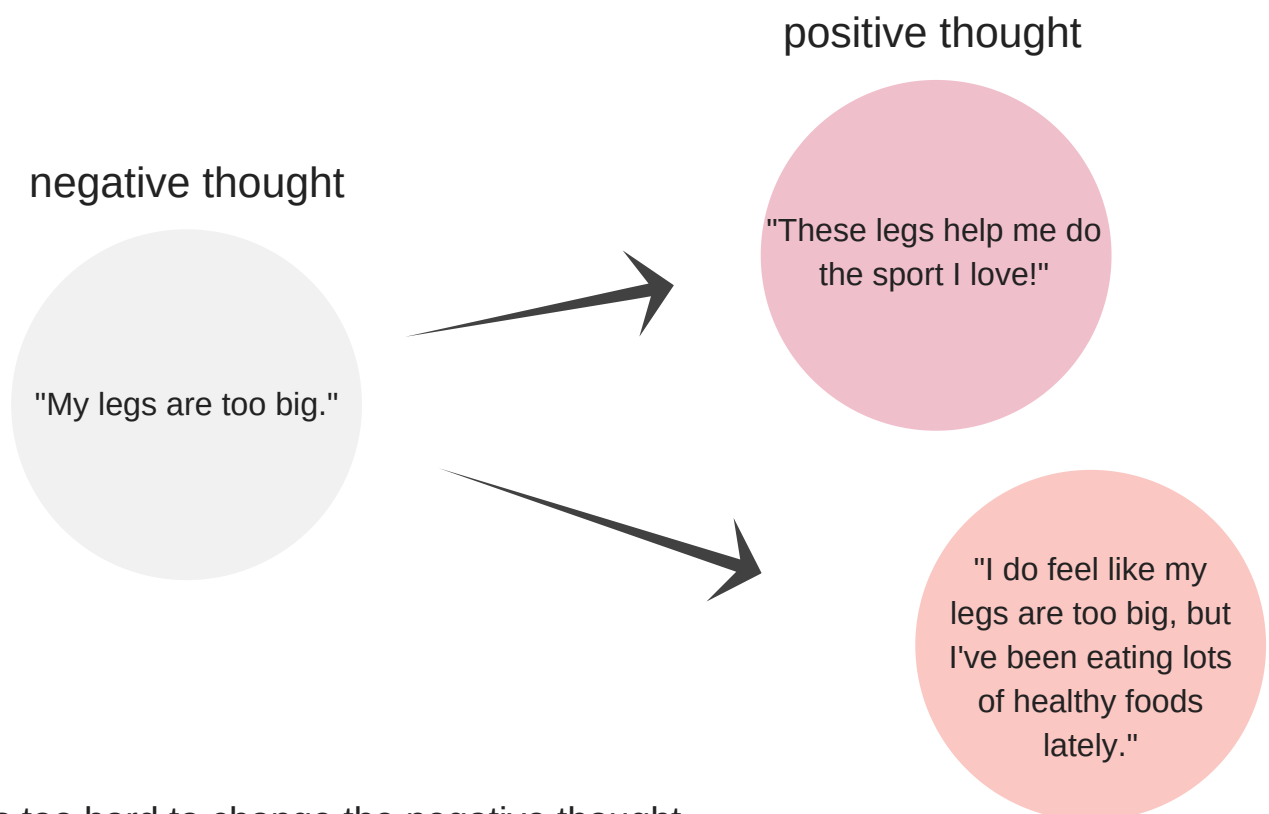
Body positivity

Being comfortable in your body goes a long way in developing a healthy, positive sexuality. By enhancing your self-esteem and body image you will find yourself more comfortable during sexual activity and will feel more empowered.

There is no wrong way to have a body. Take some time to learn about your body - how it works, how it's set up, what it needs, what it likes. Learn to nourish your body with healthy food, provide your body rest when it needs it, and experiment with what feels good (exercise? sex? different clothing styles?).

Body Positivity Exercise

Do you catch yourself having negative thoughts about your body? Sometimes we get stuck in thought patterns and one way to break the negativity is to replace each negative thought with a positive thought.



If it's too hard to change the negative thought, give yourself a new positive thought.

UM Resources

Sex positivity

Student Counselling Centre (SCC)

The SCC provides students with supports for their mental wellness. The offer offers individual counselling, workshops, and groups.

474 UMSU University Centre

204 474-8592

<https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/student-health-and-wellness/student-counselling-centre-scc>

Health and Wellness

The Health and Wellness Educator is a Registered Psychiatric Nurse and available to talk about health and wellness topics.

469 UMSU University Centre (within the SCC)

204-295-9032

healthandwellness@umanitoba.ca

<https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/health-wellness>

Console

Console is a mental health service available to UM students who have insurance through the university. Console offers 24-hour crisis support, daily journal, wellness assessment quizzes, mental health literacy training, and self-guided therapy. Console also connects students with mental health professional support VIA telephone.

https://studentcare.ca/rte/en/IHaveAPlan_UniversityofManitoba_Console_Console

Healthy U

Healthy U provides students with health and wellness resources.

healthyuofm@umanitoba.ca

<https://www.healthyuofm.com/>

University Health Services (UHS)

UHS has health care providers that can speak with you about healthy sexuality and sexual health options including birth control and pap testing.

204-474-8411

<https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/health-wellness/university-health-service>

Off Campus Resources

Sex positivity

Women's Health Clinic (WHC)

WHC has workshops that are open to all genders.

419 Graham Avenue

(204) 947-1517

whc@womenshealthclinic.org

<https://womenshealthclinic.org/>

Klinik Community Health

167 Sherbrook Street

204-784-4090

<http://klinik.mb.ca/>

Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC)

SERC offers workshops, resources, and programming on sexual health topics.

167 Sherbrook Street

(204) 982-7800

<https://serc.mb.ca/>

Nine Circles Community Health Centre

Nine Circles offers programming, resources and support on sexual health topics.

705 Broadway Street

204-940-6000

https://ninecircles.ca/contact/sex_friendly_manitoba/