



# safe sex = hot sex

"I don't do drugs,"  
says the king of  
poppers and Viagra.

BY JASON HERRING

THE NIGHT HAS settled into a groove and you are in motion. The air is thick with the chatter of conversation, the smell of smoke and beer, music and anticipation. A few drinks and you have the confidence to join the fray, a few more and you're chatting up that hotty straddling the bar stool. He leans in, his breath hot on your neck, and rewards your confidence with an invitation back to his place. The sex was hot... you think. You had an amazing time...you think. The night was a success—a hot, amazing, blurry success...you think. The next day is filled with flashes of memory. You forgot to pay your tab. You forgot to get his number. You forgot to wear a condom. None of these things seem particularly important or tarnish the experience until gonorrhea makes a burning, itching, pus-filled mess of your Johnson a few days later. STD: 1, Drunken Romeo: 0.

People often develop a habit of using alcohol and drugs to instigate or enhance sexual experiences and to avoid feelings of sexual anxiety or concerns related to sexually transmitted diseases. How many sexual encounters have people blamed on the alcohol? Research has shown that impaired judgment

due to drugs and alcohol may lead to unprotected sex and that many people with an STD do not disclose their status because they believe it is the other person's responsibility to use protection or set limits.

The recreational use of erectile dysfunction drugs such as Viagra are often used to compensate for the negative sexual side effects of other drugs (alcohol and amphetamines can make it hard to cum and/or keep an erection) and has been found to correlate with a higher rate of STDs. Mixing these drugs with others such as crystal meth is used for "marathon" sex and leads to tears and fissures and greater risk of STD transmission. Some of these mixes can be fatal, one of the more common combinations is also the most dangerous: poppers and Viagra. This combination lowers your blood pressure to the point that your brain and heart struggles to get enough oxygen to function, greatly increasing your chance for a heart attack. Not very sexy.

While drugs and partying have a large overlap there are many great ways to have a responsible evening out on the town. One is to be prepared with condoms on hand, and be sure to use them no matter if sex enters the picture. Two, do not misuse or mix "legal" drugs like Viagra, alcohol, poppers, lots of Red Bull, etc. Mixing these drugs can have very unpredictable and dangerous outcomes, especially when you throw illegal substances into the mix. Besides unpredictable outcomes, illegal drugs have no regulations, meaning they could be mixed, or "cut" with just about anything and the negative effects that drugs have on the body's immune system, organs and brain by themselves is bad enough. Finally, going out and having a fun time without the use of drugs or alcohol allows the real you to shine. Realize that you can do all that you want to do—from having great conversations, meeting new people or enjoying a steamy romance as yourself—without the assistance of alcohol or drugs.

Regardless of your approach to drinking and drugs, the most important thing is to be safe and take care of yourself and others. The last thing you want to do is have one night on the town result in a lifetime of regret. If you feel that drugs or alcohol are having an influence on your life, there are lots of options for help from LGBT friendly Alcohol Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups to LGBT counseling centers like the Persad Center. **cm**

For free HIV and STD testing, visit the Allegheny County Health Department at 3441 Forbes Avenue, (412)578-8080. HIV testing, visit the Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force, 412 345-7456.



# play safe

For gift lists that includes toys of the adult variety.

BY JASON HERRING

IT'S THAT TIME OF year when the big mythical daddy bear squeezes down your chimney to slip a goody or two in your stocking. These days it doesn't matter if you've been good or bad, chances are that Santa has something that will put a twinkle in your eye. If your holiday gift list includes toys of the adult variety, and I hope it does, there are some things to keep in mind to make sure play time is safe and enjoyable for everyone involved.

Sex toys cover a wide range of merchandise and are a major industry worldwide. In North America alone, the sex toy industry pulls in over \$500 million a year and is still growing. These numbers don't include all you crafty do-it-yourselfers. Any object used in sexual activity can be called a sex toy.

Part of the fun of the season is sharing your toys with friends, but play safe to make sure that fun is the only thing you are sharing! It is important to keep your toys clean in between uses and usually

soap and hot water is sufficient to avoid bacterial growth and general all around funkiness. Covering a sex toy with a new condom before inserting it is a great way to keep the session safe and clean. Unprotected and unclean sex toys carry the risk of getting and passing on infections such as Chlamydia, Syphilis and Herpes. If there are cuts or sores inside the vagina or anus, and there is blood involved, you also have an increased risk of contracting or passing on Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV. When sharing toys that are inserted inside the body, a fresh condom should be used for each person to minimize the risk of STD transmission.

Remember toy recalls due to toxic paints, plastics and PVC? Well, children's toys aren't the only toys affected. The lack of regulation in the sex toy industry, partly due to stigma, has allowed manufacturers to use inexpensive but highly toxic materials in the manufacture of their products to the potential harm of the consumer. Of particular concern is the use of a family of toxins known as phthalates (substances added to plastics to increase flexibility, transparency, durability and longevity). This nasty little family of chemicals causes all sorts of maladies such as testes damage, lowered sperm count, cellular resistance to insulin, endocrine disruption and metabolic interference and more. Take note about the possible link between phthalates and obesity. As one writer put it, "Your dildo could be making you fat". So again, make sure to use a fresh condom with each use.

One last note on playing safely with your new toys: hundreds of people a year visit emergency rooms to have a myriad of things removed from their anal cavities. Besides being embarrassing, these "lost" insertions can tear delicate tissue and in these moist environments wounds tend to heal slowly, increasing your chances for re-injury or infection. Always avoid drugs and alcohol in sex play since sloppily applied devices could leave you or your partner in a pinch.

That being said, there are many fun toys that are very safe as long as they are used properly and carefully. Finding your local adult toy store or fetish equipment supply center is a great start to familiarize yourself with all the wonderful gifts that you can use to keep your winter season a hot one.

So this holiday season, make sure that peace, joy and erotic stocking stuffers are the only things that you spread as you ho, ho, ho about your merry way! From our family to yours, happy holidays and play safe! **CM**

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# i seek you responsibly

Be careful with your online romances.

BY JASON HERRING  
& FATUMA CHIN  
FORMATION

ONLINE MEETING PLACES started cropping up on the web with programs like America Online (AOL) and ICQ chat in the early 1990s. Today, less than 20 years later, there are hundreds of online meeting places with millions of users, from gay and lesbian dating sites, to mobile apps that can help you find a special friend in the next aisle at the grocery store. Lots of great relationships have started online, but there are also many risks and scams that can happen if you are not careful with your online romance. Here are a few things to keep in mind: Until you meet someone in person, that individual on the other side of the chat room could be anyone. If you do meet and you don't feel comfortable or something doesn't seem right, please end the date. Don't compromise your safety just because you are horny or feeling desperate. Don't give too much personal information, such as your address, full name, bank account information, etc. Anything that could be used to tap into your online finances shouldn't be a topic of discussion in a chat room or on a first date for that matter. The non face-to-face interaction of online communication can make discussions about

sexual interests easier and less awkward for some. This is a great opportunity to set your sexual boundaries up front. Letting the person know that you "always use a condom," you "only play safe," you "reserve penetration and kissing for a long term monogamous relationship," etc. sets a clear boundary, reducing the risk of things going beyond what you are sexually comfortable with. Keep your options open. A suggestion like "let's get together for coffee and see how things go from there," is a great way to give you an out if it turns out that you don't click with the person offline. Meeting somewhere public first is also very important. Inviting a shady Craigslist respondent directly into your home is a mistake you only make once. If you do meet someone in public and decide to go home with them, let a friend know where you are headed and that you'll give a call later. Before going on the date, leave a note on your car seat or on your bed, upside down with the date's info in case you don't return. Then throw out the note after you return. Let the date know that you have to meet or call your friends soon after your encounter and they will be waiting for your call. "Disease free", "HIV neg", and "clean" mean nothing. All sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV and Hepatitis C have window periods where someone may test negative, but still be infected. If someone plays unsafe with you, they probably play unsafe with others. Always use condoms every time. HIV-positive guys need to wear condoms every time as well. Re infection, and infection with other STDs is very common among guys who don't play safe, and STDs can have a much more devastating impact if you are HIV-positive. As with any dating situation, keep a clear mind so that you can make the best decisions. Tips one through six mean nothing if you get wasted and zombie your way into an unsafe situation. Keep a close watch on your beverage intake. Make sure nothing is slipped into your drink. Carry it with you to the bathroom and rest it on the top of the urinal or toilet paper dispenser as you answer nature's call. Make sure you don't slip yourself anything either. Avoid doing drugs or excess alcohol when you meet up with your internet date because your inhibitions are the thing that can save you from the previously mentioned bad scenarios. With all these things in mind, realize that most people are genuinely quality folks who are not out to harm anyone. Look for the good in yourself and your date and have a good time together enjoying your mutual interests. No matter how your date goes, make sure it is a safe one! **CM**

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