

The Five P's of Taking a Sexual History

Partners, Prevention of Pregnancy, Protection from STIs, Practices, Past History of STIs

Counseling skills, characterized by respect, compassion, and a non-judgmental attitude towards all patients, are essential to obtaining a thorough sexual history. This also helps to effectively deliver prevention messages to patients. Key techniques include using open-ended questions, understandable language and normalizing language as shown below:

The 5 P's	Open-ended Questions to Ask
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Do you have sex with <input type="checkbox"/> men, <input type="checkbox"/> women, or <input type="checkbox"/> both” • “In the past 2 months, how many partners have you had sex with?” _____ • “In the past 12 months, how many partners have you had sex with?” _____
Prevention of Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Are you or your partner trying to get pregnant” <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No • “If no, what are you doing to prevent pregnancy?” _____
Protection from STIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What do you do to protect yourself from STIs (sexually transmitted infections) or HIV?” _____
Practices	<p>“To understand your STI risk, I need to understand the kind of sex you had recently.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you had vaginal sex?” <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No • “If yes, do you use condoms?” <input type="checkbox"/> never <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> always • “Have you had anal sex?” <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No • “If yes, do you use condoms?” <input type="checkbox"/> never <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> always • For condom answers, if never, “Why don’t you use condoms?” _____ • “If sometimes, in what situations/with whom, do you not use condoms?” _____ • “Have you had oral sex?” <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Past history of STIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you ever had a sexually transmitted infection?” <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <p>Name of infection(s): _____</p>

Adapted from the CDC; Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines, September 28, 2006. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.

Physicians and other healthcare providers must routinely and regularly obtain sexual histories from their patients and address management of risk reduction.