

Exercise good judgement and always use a condom

BEING smart and exercising good judgement go hand in hand when practising safe sex. Unfortunately studies have confirmed suspicions that alcohol and lifestyle weakens our ability to make good decisions and can lead to practising unsafe sex.

Research has shown that a vast majority of the population have not tested for HIV within the past two years and are unaware of their current HIV status.

"This means there is a high risk of contracting HIV for any new potential partner," says Dave Nowitz, the senior marketing manager at SFH, the organisation that markets New Start Testing Centres and Lovers Plus condoms.

"Aside from alcohol leading to bad decisions and making people less likely to use condoms, many who do practise safe sex with a new partner only really insist on condom use for the first three months.

"Thereafter couples seem more relaxed about practising safe sex or condom use might be seen as a lack of trust and condoms are no longer used. Do not fall into this trap as you are still at risk of contracting HIV," says Nowitz.

If you answer yes to any of the following questions it is recommended you go

for an HIV test as soon as possible.

Have you ever had unprotected sex with a new partner? Have you ever had unprotected sex with your partner of three or more months? Has your partner ever had unprotected sex with someone else? Do you always insist on using a condom with a new partner especially when you have been drinking? Have you ever had unprotected sex while being drunk?

Lastly, how often do you drink and does this make you more open to sex with new people? In a recent study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation it was found that 36% of sexually active youths aged 15-24 have said that using alcohol has affected their ability to make responsible choices about sex when drunk.

A further 23% reported to not using condoms while being drunk and engaging in sex. "For your own protection it is always best to be prepared. The best possible solution to avoid this type of situation is to always make sure you have some condoms at hand," says Nowitz.

"Lovers Plus condoms' slim-line packaging makes them easy to fit inside your wallet or handbag."

Nowitz adds: "The ability to make rational deci-

sions when living the party lifestyle and drinking excessively has always blocked our ability to make smart choices about practising safe sex.

"If you have had unprotected sex, especially when you have been out having fun and drinking, it is essential that you get tested and know your status.

"Knowing your HIV status is one of the first steps you can take towards being in control of your sexual health.

"If you are positive you can take precautions to stop the spread of HIV and get treatment as soon as possible which will give you a better quality of life.

"It is also important to remember if you are HIV positive, you will always have to wear a condom, not only for your partner's protection but your own as well, especially if your partner is HIV positive too.

"If you are lucky enough to test negative you can stay that way and carry on using a condom every time you have sex. Correct condom use is essential when dealing with your new HIV status; however, this does not mean that being with your partner has to be boring. Lovers Plus condoms come in a variety of styles and are made not only to keep you safe, but also can add some fun to your sex life," says Nowitz.

