

## What Is Fluid Bonding?

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Fluid bonding refers to couples exchanging body fluids by having barrier-free sex. A common term in ethical non-monogamy, it is a pre-planned, consensual decision to stop using condoms, dental dams, or other barrier protection. The fluids exchanged can include ejaculate, pre-ejaculate, vaginal secretions, and saliva.

For some couples, fluid bonding has a spiritual meaning. It is said to enhance intimacy, make you chemically bonded to your partner, and strengthen your attachment. However, research supporting these purported benefits of fluid bonding is lacking.

That said, plenty of evidence shows that having condom-free sex increases your risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). STI testing is recommended prior to fluid bonding.

This article discusses fluid bonding, its potential risks, and things to consider before taking that step. It also explains how couples can have a healthy discussion about fluid bonding.

## Who Practices Fluid Bonding?

Many couples do not practice safe sex. However, such actions are generally only called fluid bonding if they are an active choice of the people in the relationship. The fluids exchanged may include semen, vaginal fluids, and saliva.

The decision to become fluid bonded usually occurs after a period of time during

which the couple has been practicing safer sex.

Fluid bonding does not only happen between heterosexual couples. Men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women also engage in fluid-bonded relationships.

## Fluid Bonding With Multiple Partners

Furthermore, some people who engage in polyamory (having more than one intimate relationship at a time) and other forms of consensual non-monogamy consider themselves to be fluid bonded with one or more partners.

With polyamory, partners may still engage in protected sex outside of those relationships. This reduces—but does not eliminate—the risk of bringing an infection into the fluid-bonded relationship.

### Potential Benefits of Fluid Bonding

Couples may decide to try fluid bonding if they feel it's more convenient or if they want to try to increase intimacy and pleasure.

### Increased Intimacy

Some monogamous couples believe that fluid bonding is a way to enhance intimacy. However, there is nothing inherently more intimate about having unprotected sex in comparison to safer sex. Many couples have great intimacy for decades without exchanging fluids.

### More Convenient

Some couples may find fluid bonding more convenient since they no longer need to interrupt a sexual encounter to put on a condom or dental dam. It also offers the convenience of not having to delay sex if a barrier method is not immediately available or needs to be purchased.

### More Pleasurable

Fluid bonding may be used to try to improve pleasure through the direct contact

without a barrier. However research suggests that people consistently rate sex as highly arousing and pleasurable regardless of whether or not condoms are used.

## What to Discuss Before Fluid Bonding

The decision to fluid bond should be well thought out. This requires honest and open communication in advance. It is not a decision that should be rushed or made hastily in the heat of the moment.

Items to discuss with your partner in advance of fluid bonding include:

- Reasons you want to fluid bond
- Sexual health history and risk of STIs
- Recent STI testing and frequency of future testing
- The potential for pregnancy, use of birth control, and expectations if pregnancy does occur
- Level of exclusivity in your relationship
- Setting boundaries around using protection with other partners, if not exclusive
- Degree of trust and transparency between partners

Fluid bonding needs to be consensual and planned in advance. If you are not ready to have barrier-free sex with your partner, be clear and direct about it. Likewise, if your partner is not ready, don't try to change their mind.

## Fluid Bonding and STI Risk

The primary risk associated with fluid bonding is an increased risk of STIs. That is particularly true if you or your partner's prior STI testing is not comprehensive. Not all healthcare providers test for all STIs, but not everyone realizes that, so testing can give you a false sense of security.

In addition, many couples don't realize how many STIs have no symptoms. They may incorrectly believe that it's safe to stop using barriers *even without testing* if

neither partner has any obvious symptoms.

Most couples wait to explore the possibility of fluid bonding until they have been tested for STIs.

## STI Testing Prior to Fluid Bonding

STIs can be bacterial, viral, or parasitic infections. Unfortunately, there is no single test that can detect all STIs. In addition, most healthcare providers do not routinely test for all STIs. This means that you will need to be specific about the tests you want.

Be open with your healthcare provider about your reason for STI testing and be honest about your sexual health history. You may need to specifically ask for the full array of STI tests, which may include:

- **Chlamydia:** Men who have sex with men and sexually active women under the age of 25 should be tested yearly. Women over age 25 with risk factors, such as new or multiple partners or a partner with an STD, should also be tested yearly.
- **Gonorrhea:** The same testing guidelines as chlamydia apply.
- **HIV:** Anyone with risk factors, such as multiple partners, should be tested yearly. Men who have sex with men should be tested at least once a year and possibly every three to six months. All adults and adolescents from age 13 to 64 should also be tested at least once in their life for HIV, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- **Herpes:** Testing is recommended if you have genital symptoms, such as blisters or sores, or you have a sex partner who has genital herpes.
- **Hepatitis:** Anyone who is pregnant should be tested for Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C starting early in pregnancy.
- **Syphilis:** Anyone who is pregnant should be tested for syphilis starting early in pregnancy.

STI testing can be done by your primary care provider, gynecologist, or urologist. You can also get tested at Planned Parenthood or an STI clinic. Online STI test kits are also an option some people prefer due to privacy concerns.

## Fluid Bonding and Pregnancy Risk

Couples who practice barrier-free sex are also at a greater risk of unplanned pregnancy. If you are not ready for pregnancy, it is important to use other forms of birth control.

## Hormonal Birth Control

Most types of non-barrier contraception involve hormones that work on the female reproductive system to prevent pregnancy. These include oral birth control, vaginal rings, patches, implants, and injections. Intrauterine devices (IUDs) may also contain slow-release hormones, such as Mirena.

## Hormone-Free Contraception

Some people are unable to use hormonal contraception due to side effects or medical risks. Hormone-free options include diaphragms, cervical caps, the contraceptive sponge, and spermicide. Hormone-free IUDs, like the Copper T, are also an option.

## The Pull-Out Method

Some couples opt to use *coitus interruptus*, better known as the withdrawal method or pulling out. When done correctly, this method is 96% effective. That means four out of every 100 couples relying on the withdrawal method will become pregnant in a year.

## Natural Family Planning

Natural family planning is another technique some couples use to prevent pregnancy. This involves tracking your menstrual cycle and watching for signs of ovulation. To prevent pregnancy, the couple either avoids intercourse during the fertile window or uses a back-up method at that time. However, research shows natural family planning has a typical failure rate of 24%.

## Myths About Fluid Bonding

Some people think unprotected sex means partners are more committed to the

relationship, but that's a belief many sex educators want to change.

Practicing safer sex shouldn't be seen as a sign that someone doesn't trust their partner. Instead, it should be seen as a sign of respect for their body and a symbol of their desire to protect the person (or people) they love from harm.

It is certainly possible to make an informed decision to become fluid bonded with a partner. That's true even with a partner who is positive for an STI.

However, fluid bonding is not a choice that should be made lightly.

Fluid bonding should never be a way of proving your love or your trust. Why would you even start to discuss the possibility of having unprotected sex with someone if either love or trust was a question?

## A Word From Verywell

People may engage in fluid bonding for positive or negative reasons. That's why it's so important for people to be aware of, and able to discuss the risks.

If you are considering becoming fluid bonded with a partner, it's important to discuss your sexual history openly and honestly. It's also important to discuss your commitments around sexual exclusivity and or practicing safe sex. Be realistic about what you can and can't do in your relationship.

Then you can make a good decision about whether becoming fluid bonded makes sense, or whether you'll both be happier and feel more secure if you decide to continue practicing safer sex.

## 5 Sources

Verywell Health uses only high-quality sources, including peer-reviewed studies, to support the facts within our articles. Read our editorial process to learn more about how we fact-check and keep our content accurate, reliable, and trustworthy.

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