

Looking After Your Health



While it's important for everyone to maintain a healthy state of wellbeing, it is especially important for sex workers. The level of physical intimacy between sex workers and our clients far exceeds that of any other occupation. We are expected to look good, feel good, maintain our sexual health and be able to perform to satisfy our clients and stay safe with them. Self-care is really important.

This information sheet provides tips on how to maintain your health and wellbeing. It is important to be aware of your own limitations and the client's expectations when negotiating all aspects of a booking. The booking is negotiated with mutual consent and you should not be pressured into doing anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

If you are working for someone else, clarify your expectations with your manager. For example, you may want to find out what constitutes a standard service and what is considered an extra?

What are you going to be reading about?...

- Warning signs your health may be suffering
- So what's going on?
- Things that can impact your health

Warning signs your health may be suffering

You can tell if you're beginning to get run down or life is getting you down because your body will let you know. For example you may:

- Have cold sore outbreaks
- Have herpes outbreaks
- Have asthma flare-ups
- Have migraines
- Have pimples
- Have eczema or psoriasis flare-ups
- see an increase in wrinkles or get black bags under your eyes or puffy eyes
- Feel too tired to walk up a hill
- Find either that you can't sleep or can't stop sleeping
- Bruise more easily
- Have recurring thrush or urinary tract infections

- Feel lethargic in bookings and in your personal life
- Have irregular periods
- Get colds, flu, chest infections
- Feel like you can't stop crying
- Have anxiety attacks

So what's going on?

There are many reasons you may get run down as a result of work. Work can affect our physical, emotional, and mental health; which all influence each other.

Our work often involves meeting our client's emotional as well as physical needs. It can be mentally draining to do this while also ensuring our own wellbeing and safety. This stress can take a toll on us physically as well.

“There are many reasons you may get run down or have a physical reaction”

Things that can impact on your health:

The hours you work—Sometimes we may do 12-hour bookings, work from 10pm – 6am, or work 7 days a week for 18 months without any downtime.

We may be shift working, staying awake all night looking after our kids or have a straight job we do for 9 hours a day before running off to work in the sex industry for another 12 hours.

Our bodies need a certain number of hours downtime to regenerate through sleep. We also have internal body clocks that have been telling us since we were babies that we should sleep at night and be awake during the day.

If we go against what our bodies have spent years training us to do or if we don't allow our bodies to have some downtime and regenerate, any one of the previously mentioned physical symptoms may happen.

If you find yourself having a physical reaction, it's helpful to consider the amount of hours you're working and when.

Have a think about if you can cut down these hours or change the hours you work to a time that better agrees with your body clock.

Stress—This can be caused by different things, including your home life, working long hours and still not making enough money to pay the bills, clients playing games with you, people bitching about you, knowing you have to see another 5 clients that day, the fight you had with your mother before you came to work, the politics of the sex industry, the STI test you have tomorrow and even not knowing what you want to do when you leave the industry.

All of this stress from the different roles you play combines inside your body and has to manifest somehow.

It's a good idea to try and work out what stresses you out, how much it stresses you out and to know what your stress limit is so that you know how much you can take on board.

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If, for example, you have a low threshold for stress and thinking about how much money you need to make stresses you right out, it may help to not set such strict money goals.

Rather, set the goal that you will go to work every day this week and make as much as you can and try and sell a few extras. Or if talking to your partner at work stresses you out, don't answer your phone at work.

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Eating—Many of us have trouble with eating because we may not have anywhere to cook healthy meals at work and so eat a lot of take away or food we buy at the convenience store.

We may have clients who bring chocolate to eat or use chocolate as a tool at work, so we eat a lot of chocolate.

We may not want to eat or cook in case we get a client; we may eat comfort food to make us feel better, or we may eat food at bad times of the day (eating macaroni and cheese or a baked dinner at 3am is not the best idea).

As a sex worker you're providing a physical service and have to look good, so it's important to eat as healthily as you can at reasonable hours.

Try and buy some Lean Cuisines because they are quick and easy to cook and eat. If buying dinner from a service station or Night Owl, try and buy the food that is not heavily processed, like yoghurt, pre-packed sandwiches or frozen meals.

Try and eat at the regular hours you would if you weren't sex working. The other trick some of us use is to get our clients to bring healthy food to a booking.

For example, some workers will suggest to regulars that it would be romantic to have a picnic. They'll give their client a list of food to buy and bring with them to the next booking.

Some workers will also tell their clients they are so stressed out with uni or home life they haven't had time to eat and feel special, so they get the client to suggest they take them on a dinner booking. Many sole operators put on their websites that they are available for dinner bookings, which is also a good way to get good food at work.

Counselling clients—As sex workers, we often use the same skills a counsellor would use.

For example, we put ourselves in our client's shoes to understand where they're coming from, listen to intimate details about their lives, listen to how they're feeling, and sometimes we care about a client.

Being emotionally and mentally available can push our boundaries and be stressful, upsetting and draining, all of which can cause a physical reaction.

To deal with this, be self-aware and know if you're reaching your threshold for being emotionally and mentally available to your clients.

If you are, you could try avoiding regulars you know who are after a more intimate service or who dump on you. Or you could run a special where you provide a half-hour service of a particular type that doesn't allow for conversation.

If you feel able to, when the client starts talking to you, try and redirect them by saying "Darling, we've both had a super hard day today, so how about we lie down on the bed, clear our minds and really get into this together. Let me start off by giving you a lovely body slide while we listen to some music".

Lack of sleep—Exhaustion can bring on multiple physical symptoms because we're not giving our bodies and minds downtime to regenerate, and symptoms can include mania, psychosis, depression and extreme lethargy.

This can also cause us not to be able to think clearly so we can make decisions that may put us at physical risk.

Poor appetite, being too tired to go shopping to buy proper food or being too tired to see a client, answer an email or answer the phone are some of the common issues we face.

When you do finally crash, it can cause you to sleep through and miss a shift in a brothel, miss

bookings or miss answering your phone. You can use drugs or alcohol to make you sleepy but for some people this makes them more awake.

Try going for a walk a couple of hours before you go to bed to clear your mind so you're not lying in bed being kept awake by thoughts.

Don't watch television that is disturbing, don't eat right before bed, and try and stay awake for a little while when you get home so you can come down and relax after work before going to bed.

If you can't sleep or have disturbed sleep for extended periods of time, try and catch up on sleep by having a few days off work.

If you're shift working, maybe try and swap to just working days or nights for a while, and you could try having a sleep between clients whether you're in a brothel or a sole operator working from home.

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Environment—This plays a really important part in every aspect of your health.

If you're in a brothel all day and don't go out in the sunshine, or if you are sitting in a unit as a sole operator all day and don't go outside because you're always waiting for the next job, it can have an impact on your physical, emotional and mental health.

If you're unable to change your physical environment because you have no choice but to work where you are, you can try and cheer it up a little bit by putting some candles around the place, opening the blinds to get some light in when you don't have a client, buying some cheap flowers (or convincing your clients they should buy you flowers).

Feeling like you've done something positive to look after yourself can help, so spend some time every day making your workplace as nice as it can be and tell yourself you deserve the best environment you can achieve.

“Getting out and interacting with other people can go a long way towards keeping you healthy”

Many sole operators will find themselves in very sterile environments because they can't have anything personal around, can't hang pictures on the walls and can't have anything out that can be used as a weapon.

Sole operators can also spend a lot of time sitting in their units waiting for a call for work. These two things can isolate us and make us feel like we're sitting in a jail cell, which can do our heads in. Also, because we may not be going out and exercising, it can weaken our muscles and immune systems, both of which have a direct impact on our physical health.

If you find yourself in this situation, it's really important you make yourself go outside everyday for a walk and try and do something you would do if you weren't working.

Go to a shop and buy some milk so you can have a normal interaction with someone who doesn't want something from you, go for a walk early in the morning when there's no-one around so you have time to clear your head and set your goals.

Getting out and interacting with other people can go a long way towards keeping you healthy.

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Bottling things up—You may have lots of friends, but it doesn't mean you have someone to debrief with and rely on for support, which is really important for sex workers.

For example, if you have a client who abuses you in some way and you're already stressed out, in extreme cases some workers may self-harm or release the stress and anger by self-harming with a client.

Some of us may ask clients to slap our butts while we're being bonked to the point that it marks the skin or hurts, for example, which we normally wouldn't allow.

We may abuse clients so that the sex is rougher than we would usually allow.

We may drink more, use more drugs, call an ex-partner we know will verbally abuse us, spend all of our money or even take a knife and cut ourselves with it.

Many people have their 'thing' and it's important to know what your thing is, at what point you begin seeking it out and how to deal with it in a healthier and safer way if you find yourself getting to this point.

Some things some workers do to short circuit self-harming is talk to a friend they can be open and honest with, see a counsellor, go bowling, play squash, go to a deserted place and scream, have some acupuncture, keep a journal, or they may go for a midnight feast and have cups of tea and chocolate cake with another worker.

It's great if you can do some of these things regularly so that you can avoid bottling things up. But if you can't, it's good to find the things you can do to release the steam valve and let everything out quickly, effectively and efficiently rather than impulsively with a client.

Straight life—This is the other part of our lives we work to support, and all sex workers will face pressures and stresses that may impact on their work life.

Whether we have children and partners, live alone with limited family, are putting ourselves through uni, or whether we have no family, no direction, no goals and feel completely lost, these can all impact life.

This may manifest physically and cause lack of sleep, irregular sleep patterns or even cause us to engage in risky behaviours at home that will impact on our work life.

It's vital to find some way to have a work/life balance. The first step to doing this is to identify your pressures and then see if you can find a way to make things easier or share the load somehow.

It can help if you talk to a family member, friend or counsellor about your life because they are removed from the situation so have a different perspective, or they may have ideas and solutions you hadn't considered yet.

Disassociation—This is where we detach ourselves from our emotions or bodies.

Some sex workers may disassociate on purpose or not realise we're doing it.

It can keep us safe when we have limited or no control, or we may do it to keep ourselves together in times of stress.

It's important to know this may happen so that we know that if we have gone through a traumatic experience that may not register as being awful that it's important to do something nice for ourselves afterwards.

Providing heavy services—This may include offering fisting on you as a service, seeing a high volume of clients, which is going to put more wear and tear on the body than two clients a day for a longer period of time), allowing clients to use toys on you or providing a sub service where you may be flogged or caned.

If you offer these services, you will need to take extra care to remain safe, sane and healthy.

Ideally, you'd give yourself more downtime so that your body has more time to recover and regenerate; however, if you can't afford the downtime, there are things you can be doing everyday in the workplace to reduce the impact on your mind and body.

It may include using lots of lube and the right lube for the job if you're doing fisting, being clear when negotiating with your clients about the limits of the service and exactly how you will allow the service to be done, having antiseptic and antibacterial materials for both yourself and your workspace if using tools or implements common in BDSM. And it can be as simple as buying toys that are made out of softer materials like silicone rather than hard rubber or metal.

Drugs and alcohol—Whether it is drinking, smoking, using drugs or snorting amyl in bookings, it all has an impact on our health.

Mentally, you may feel scattered and not in complete control of your emotions, and of course there's the dreaded hangover. If you use drugs and alcohol frequently or in large quantities, you're more likely to experience these symptoms, which can have an impact on your work and work practices. If you're using cocaine, speed or other drugs in a booking or if you drink too much you may find your senses are dulled and judgment impaired. This may make it harder to stick to your boundaries.

Poor nutrition—If you're someone who is eating at irregular hours, eating heavily processed food, exercising a lot or working a lot, or you have lots of stress or are feeling run down, it can be a good idea to take vitamin and mineral supplements.

These can help to boost your immune system and energy levels. It's important to know which supplements to take however, so it's a good idea to discuss what you could take with your doctor, especially if you're pregnant or on other medications.

Sex in your straight life—Some sex workers contract STIs in their straight life although they can work 10+ years without contracting an STI at work. There are usually a few common reasons, including the fact that we may not use prophylactics at home because we want to feel different from when we're at work.

People who have a partner may feel pressured to have sex without a condom at home so that their partner feels like they have something that is sacred to them and no-one else.

Workers may also have an open relationship or partner who believes they should be allowed to have sex with multiple partners because you are a sex worker. If your partner has sex without a condom or dam with someone else and then has sex with you without a condom or dam, they may give you an STI.

Some sex workers who don't use a condom with their partners may want to douche every day before work if their partner's cum has a particularly strong smell. Douching every day can upset the balance in your vagina or anus and cause micro-tears and infections.

The most important thing is to be realistic and do what you can to stay healthy and support your friends in doing the same. Working to maintain a healthier life with a friend who is a sex worker can be the best way to motivate yourself—and each other.

Often it takes two people to be as healthy as you can be because it reduces isolation, helps you debrief and helps to keep your emotions flowing. It can also be very useful to have someone to cook for and drag you outside to exercise if you can't seem to motivate yourself to do it alone.

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Disclaimer:

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