

How to Top: Our Tips for Becoming a Better, Safer Top in Bed

 them.us/story/how-to-top-guide-to-being-a-better-top

Matt Baume



Top of the morning to you, tops. Whether you're a big muscle daddy, a playful pup, or a domme with a strap-on, anyone can take on the role of a top in the bedroom. Penetrating your partner can be a fun way to get close, practice trust, and just make a good old fashioned sweaty mess. (Just make sure whoever you're playing with has read our [guides to bottoming](#), so you can be confident they're on your level!)

Topping might seem straightforward enough, but it can come with its share of challenges, both physical and emotional. While sexual play and adventure are great, you might not know where to start — and there are some wrong moves you could make while penetrating another person that could actually hurt them.

Don't be afraid, though: With a little forethought, practice, and plenty of communication and consent, you can top with the best of them. If you're a curious newcomer to penetrative sex, if you've only ever bottomed, or if you're an old topping pro, you can always stand to try something new and hone your sexual skills. Read on for some best practices — with the caveat that this article isn't medical advice, and if you have any concerns, you should talk to a doctor.

What Does it Mean to Top?

Let's start all the way at the beginning.

Generally speaking, a top is someone who performs an insertive or penetrative role in sex. That can take a wide range of forms, from oral to anal to vaginal. Tops are often thought of as having a dominant, assertive attitude, but that's not always the case; tops can be small and submissive, too. If you're putting something — a part of your body or a toy — into a partner, you're a top.

If you're topping someone and there's likely to be an exchange of bodily fluids, it's very important to practice certain precautions and to know your status when it comes to sexually transmitted infections. We'll talk more about that in a bit.

How Do I Know if I'm a Top?

The good news is that anyone can top! If you're curious about putting yourself or a toy inside your partner (or partners!), then you're a top.

The more you play, the more you'll figure out what role suits you best. Some people are exclusive tops, meaning they only like to play the insertive role; others are exclusive bottoms, taking a receptive role. Many people are versatile, taking both top and bottom roles depending on the mood.

One good way to figure out what role is best for you is to play with a trusted partner and see what you enjoy most. But you can also just look at different kinds of porn and think about what seems the most fun. (Just remember that porn is a fantasy; and nobody, not even porn performers, really have sex like you see in their videos.) You can also play on your own with toys to find out if you like to penetrate or be penetrated.

How to Get Ready to Top

Sex works best when all parties involved set expectations, boundaries, and preferences ahead of time. Before you're in the middle of things, talk about what sort of penetration you like, or if you're not sure what you like, what you'd like to try. Listen and respect your partners' boundaries.

It's advisable for bottoms to practice some extra hygiene before sex, particularly if anal fun is part of the plan and you want to avoid encountering poop. An enema or douching kit can help make sure bottoms are ready for showtime, and that things won't get messy in a way that most people don't enjoy.

Advertisement

Usually, it's up to the bottom to make sure that hygiene is done ahead of time; but if you want to be a polite and attentive top, you can offer to supply cleaning tools. You may also want to make sure there's a towel under your partner, and cleanup stuff nearby just in case. The bottom has to do the bulk of the preparation here, so the least you can do is help with the aftermath.

And of course, your body should be clean too, unless your partner prefers otherwise. And you should trim and file your nails if you're planning to insert your fingers.

Dealing with Performance Anxiety When Topping, and How to Top for the First Time

If you're topping for the first time, you should also be prepared to take things slow. Don't expect to go wild right away — this is going to be a learning process, so set your expectations for a gradual process at first, full of check-ins with your partner. Let them know that they can take a break at any time, try something different, or finish things early if they're not having a good time.

Staying calm and relaxed is going to improve the process in a variety of ways. From a purely physical perspective, keeping calm will help the bottom's body accommodate whatever is being inserted. But it can also reduce performance anxiety, which once it starts has a way of getting worse and worse.

If anxiety and nerves are an issue, you might try creating a more relaxing mood, with low light, candles, and calm music. You can even make stretching and yoga part of your foreplay. Limit your intake of caffeine and other stimulants. And if you find your thoughts drifting to what can go wrong, try to reframe your thinking to the pleasure that you're providing instead. Praise your partner and build their self-confidence, and let them do the same for you.

Where's the Male G-Spot?

You might've heard that there's a special spot inside the butt that feels particularly good. For people who were born with a penis, that's the prostate gland. While it's tricky to hit with a dick, you can find it more easily with your fingers. (Remember to trim those nails.)

Start by practicing on yourself: Lube up your fingers and then reach behind. It's about knuckle-deep, and you'll know when you hit it because it's very sensitive. Give it a slow "come here" tickle to get it going. A specially-curved vibrator can also work.

The prostate is typically about 2 inches inside the rectum, so you don't need to go far. And it's typically quite sensitive, so it doesn't need a ton of pressure to activate. Nobody's exactly sure why it feels good — one theory is that it might simply be close to the same nerves that feel good on other body parts.

People assigned female at birth usually have different internal structures, and some surgeries involve the removal of the prostate, so this may not be an option for everyone. But even without this organ, it's still possible to have lots of fun with anal sex.

Is Topping Safe?

The short answer is that yes, topping is safe, provided you're careful.

If you're having anal sex, there are some particular precautions you should take. In short, bring lots of lube; go slow, and know your status. You'll need to make sure that your dick, or whatever you're using to penetrate, is very slick with lube. Press slowly, check with your partner to make sure they're okay, and then proceed gradually while encouraging them to breathe.

Advertisement

It can take a few minutes for a bottom's body to stretch to accommodate you, so don't be impatient. Going too fast can hurt a lot, and can even cause painful tears that take a long time to heal.

Topping can be a high-risk activity if you have an STI or don't know your status. It's very important to get tested before topping and to disclose your status to your partner. Even if your test is negative, wearing a condom provides an additional level of safety just in case. Unless you're certain that everyone involved has been monogamous, condom usage is good sense, good health, and good manners.

Anal Sex and HIV Safety

Few aspects of anal sex are more important than knowing your status. It's absolutely crucial that everyone involved is aware of and discloses their history with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. If someone isn't aware of their status, they can manage the risk with condoms, PrEP, and PEP, but there's no substitute for frequent testing.

You should be using a variety of tools to protect your sexual health, whether with anal sex or with other kinds of encounters. But anal sex carries particular risk, because it involves the internal exchange of fluids. A condom or dental dam can significantly reduce the danger of transmitting an infection, but remember — in rare cases, condoms can fail. They're just one tool in your arsenal.

Another protective measure is Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). Although PrEP is usually thought of as a once-daily HIV medication you use to prevent new infections, it's actually a whole suite of interventions, including regular health checkups, testing, and education. When all of the elements of PrEP are combined, it's almost totally effective in preventing HIV transmission. But you'll still be vulnerable to other infections, and PrEP has been known to fail on extremely rare occasions.

If you or your partner are HIV positive, TasP (Treatment as Prevention) is another effective way to play safely. Essentially, TasP means that someone who already has HIV is adhering to their medication regimen consistently enough that they're undetectable, meaning HIV cannot be detected in the blood through testing — and those who are undetectable cannot transmit HIV.

You should also be aware of Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, or PEP. That's a pill that you can get the day after having sex if you think you might have been exposed. Between these three treatment and prevention options and tools like condoms, there are plenty of ways you can protect yourself while having fun in the bedroom.

What if Topping Hurts My Partner?

Sometimes, bottoming can hurt in a way that's pleasurable, like an intense workout or massage. The pain can be a relief. And for some people, more intense pain can be a cathartic experience.

Provided you're careful and communicating with each other, injuries can be rare.

It's a good idea to frequently check in with your partner with a simple question, like "how are you doing," or "does that feel good," or "faster or slower?" Let your partner know that they can always answer honestly. If they tell you that they want something to stop, it's extremely important that you immediately comply. Not just because you could be causing harm, but because forcing sex on someone against their will is rape — even if they previously gave you permission.

If something hurts, that's often the body's way of letting you know that something is wrong. So if your partner says that they're feeling pain, or if they have a look of pain on their face, it's probably best to back off, slow down, or take a break. Let your bottom set the pace. If they say it's ok to proceed, then you can. Consent is always mandatory.

Advertisement

In some cases, topping someone can cause a more serious injury. If you see blood, or if your partner's in unpleasant pain even after you stop, it's time to call it quits. Gently clean yourselves up — you may need to help your bottom get clean — and then rest.

Sometimes, some pain or injury just happens by accident, even if you've been careful. It doesn't mean you're a bad top, just that you need to talk about what happened and what you could do differently next time. If pain and blood continue after several days, go to a doctor or free clinic.

Think of it like running, wrestling, or weight lifting: By taking it slow and understanding physical limits, you can greatly reduce the risk of injury.

How Do I Stay Hard While Topping?

For some people it's easy to keep an erection throughout the experience. But others might find their boner coming and going, especially if your bottom needs a lot of time to get used to you. There are a few tricks you can use to help keep it hard: A cock ring, which provides

tight pressure around the base of the penis, is one easy way to keep the blood in your dick; you can even get rings that vibrate to pleasure you both. Cutting alcohol from your diet can help too. You might find it pleasurable to have a sex toy of your own inserted so you're bottoming while you top.

For some people, erectile dysfunction drugs can help. If you have a medical condition that makes it difficult to maintain an erection, talk to a doctor. Particularly as you age, it can be challenging to stay hard as long as you want.

It's a bad idea to use ED drugs recreationally or without medical guidance. Counterfeit versions of common ED medications can be dangerous, and using ED pills without a prescription can cause serious side effects or interactions. Some people can become dependent on ED drugs, which can actually worsen sexual performance. To be clear: You should never take erectile dysfunction drugs without a prescription.

But if you're not as hard as you want to be, that's not necessarily a deal-breaker. There's no reason you can't pull out for a bit, play in some other way that you know gets you going, and then jump back to something more penetrative. One of the best things about being queer is the wide range of sexual possibilities, and penetration isn't the end-all-be-all of sex. Play around, try new things, figure out what feels best and what your body is capable of, and remember — the point of sex is to have a good time.