

Make the Pledge to #GetOnTop of Your Sexual Health & Help Millennials Have Safe Sex

“No one feels weird carrying around a green juice,” Meika Hollender, cofounder of natural condom and sexual wellness company, Sustain tells me. But condoms... not so much.

I was hooking up with a guy recently and I asked him, “Do you have safe sex?”

He looked at me deadpan and said, “You mean with condoms?”

Having come-of-age in the 90s, I was fed the narrative: “have safe sex or end up infected with a life-threatening disease.” No longer a rebellious teen, but a sexually active woman who drinks a lot of green juice, I’m admitting that I don’t always have safe sex. And I can stand to love myself a little more, which is why I’ve made the pledge to #GetOnTop, a campaign led by Hollender and a band of female influencers to make a public pledge to invest in their sexual wellbeing.

I know I’m not alone having unsafe sex, (not just because of the people with whom I’ve had it) but from conversations I’ve had with girlfriends. And from this notion in bohemian culture that no one uses condoms. Take this passage from writer Luke B. Goebel’s hipster madcap essay for *Autre Magazine* on Marfa, Texas:

It is a perfectly branded aesthetic tailored experience where everything feels just elegant, minimalist, clean... it’s art, real art, and nothing else...on the surface...capitalism and the world of 2015 seemingly just runs off and away like rain on a well lubricated surface—think condoms—but who uses them?!

Are millennials having safe sex? 21 percent of sexually active women ages 20 to 44 use condoms regularly, and 71 percent feel shy about purchasing them, according to a recent study of Sexual Health In the United States.

And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 44 percent of female teenagers and 47 percent of male teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 are sexually active. STDs continue to affect teens as young as 13.

As you can see, fear is not always an effective motivation. Which is exactly why Hollender’s campaign relies on another idea. Hollender found solidarity with nine other women, including Jenne Lombardo, Co-Founder of Milk Studios and Founder of MADE Fashion Week, and Refinery29’s creative director and cofounder Piera Gelardi, to create the campaign video. In the video, each woman shares her personal reason for practicing safe sex; Hollender, Gelardi, and Lombardo spoke with me for this Huff Post Impact interview. Rather than leading with scare tactics, Hollender and her badass squad leads by example. After all, the influencers in the campaign are trailblazers in the boardroom, and so too, they open up about why it’s just as important to #GetOnTop in the bedroom with this new campaign.

Piera Gelardi, also known for her influential bestselling book, *Style Stalking*, one of the ten women Hollender enlisted as a public face of #GetOnTop, made the pledge because there’s so much more of the world she wants to see and do. She elaborates:

When I was younger, I wasn’t always on top of my sexual health, and it really took a toll on me — worrying about sexual health can be really, really stressful! Once I took control over that part of my life, I was able to focus my mental energy elsewhere, and I felt great about myself and my sex life. While not all STIs are life-threatening, they can physically and emotionally prevent you from living your life to the fullest. By saying “there is so much I want to do and see in this life”, I’m speaking to the notion of staying sexually safe and healthy for my body, as well as my mind and soul.

Coming from a place of self-love and a place that doesn’t tolerate shame, Hollender’s #GetOnTop campaign is aspirational. “I wanted to highlight that women do such a great job of owning their other parts of health and sexual health is just as important,” Hollender tells me. “When you bring up condoms and safe sex, people get uncomfortable, and think it’s icky. We have to normalize this conversation.

As Hollender points out, safe sex isn't just about using a condom. Safe sex encompasses many aspects. Hollender says, "Safe sex is a woman feeling empowered and in control and free to enjoy sexual pleasure."

Lombardo, who works in fashion, an industry known for selling sex to arouse consumers tells me, "There's a difference between what we look at and how we need to behave. What you see might be suggestive, but you have your own mind." She continues, "You have the power of your dome." In other words, use your head and think for yourself instead of internalizing what the fashion world or Hollywood or the media tells you about what's hot.

Gelardi, media maven herself, agrees, noting, "The media can have a huge impact on the way women view sex, sexuality, and what's "normal" (as if there's such thing as "normal" when it comes to sex), and there's just so much information out there, it can be overwhelming. It's important for women to know that there's no "right" way to conduct their sex lives; as long as women are being safe, giving and seeking consent, and enjoying themselves, they have nothing to worry about."

What's helpful to remember is Lombardo's sex-positive and progressive view of sex, which doesn't stop her from setting boundaries in order to protect herself.

"If you love and respect yourself you'll make smart decisions when it comes to sex. Your decisions will reflect your self worth, and you'll protect your dome," Lombardo tells me (I love how 'the dome' encompasses mind, body, and spirit). She defines safe sex as part of a mentality where "I'm making decisions that are right for me regardless of whether or not my decisions make sense to others."

The mother of three, including one daughter, says "from an early age girls are taught that the word 'no' is a bad word." But self-respect means setting limits. And Gelardi agrees, adding:

I want women to know that they can make changes on an individual level, within their own sex life — speak up when they're uncomfortable, seek out sex positive information and role models, and share their experiences — and on a societal level. That doesn't necessarily mean women have to be writing letters to their state legislators (though that's definitely a welcome approach!); it can mean supporting the women in their lives and putting aside judgements. Sex is not a one-size-fits-all activity, and at the end of the day, we're all in this together, no matter what choices we make around sex.

With all this in mind, I made the pledge, and I'm hoping other people make it along with me, because there's power in numbers.

For every pledge made, Sustain will also donate a condom to a young woman, in partnership with Bedsider and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy.