

# SEX



## Fuck yeah, sober sex!

My early sexual experiences were soaked in a lot of alcohol. Not so much that I couldn't consent – although that definitely happened on some occasions – but certainly enough to offer lubrication, if you will. Drinking gave me Dutch courage for those awkward, fumble-y first times and was a way to manage anxieties about body image. Without really knowing it, I was self-medicating dysphoria.

Even in loving, committed relationships, the thought of lights-on, sober sex would have made me shudder. I thought I had confidence and I thought I had swagger, but actually, looking back, I was terrified. I didn't know my body, I didn't know how to be vulnerable and I didn't know how to communicate my desires. In short, I didn't know how to be intimate – with myself, or with others.

"Sobriety is the ultimate embracing of intimacy," says Rose Romain, a recovery coach and co-host of the Sober Sex (fuck yeah!) podcast. She got sober eight years ago and now helps other people to do the same. She tells me that the journey to intimacy is "a political one". "I tried to come out as bi when I was younger and a family

CARRIE  
LYELL MEETS  
RECOVERY  
COACH ROSE  
ROMAIN  
TO FIND  
OUT HOW  
BEING SOBER  
INCREASES  
INTIMACY

member was really confrontational around that, so I pushed it the fuck down. When I got sober, I was like, I'm fucking owning this. It was the first time I could advocate for all sides of my personality, my identity. I don't have to be digestible to others anymore."

Addiction is a huge problem in the LGBTQI community, as we know. Various studies have shown that we are at higher risk of experiencing poor mental health, including self-harm, alcohol and substance misuse, and lez/bi women are twice as likely as straight women to binge drink. Even those of us – like myself – who wouldn't consider ourselves to have a problem can still have a worrying relationship with alcohol. But there's no one reason why queer women in particular struggle with addiction. It could be "stigma, violence, trauma, judgement", Rose explains, or a combination of all of those. "These things aren't prevalent in the cis, straight world in the same way. Drugs and alcohol can become a fast track to intimacy, to connection, and a way of dealing with shame."

While not sober, I have a much



44 **My secret sex diary**  
Natasha's first time with a woman changed *everything*



45 **Sexy Bits**  
The hottest toys, tips and temptations this month



better and much healthier relationship with alcohol these days, because I've learnt how to confront some of the issues that plagued me when I was younger. I'm no longer afraid to be intimate, to be vulnerable, and I'm having better sex for it. For others, though, mindful drinking is not an option, finding sobriety is the only way to fully embrace themselves and their sexuality. But it's not easy. Early sobriety can be really difficult to navigate, Rose says, because it is so exposing. "You have this initial, 'Oh fuck... here I am'. And then it's like, 'Oh fuck. HERE I AM! Bring it the fuck on. Now, I get to show up for all these parts of myself. It's exciting. And terrifying."

For those questioning their relationship with alcohol, particularly in relation to sex, Rose advises to be gentle and not to shame yourself

– something she didn't manage to do herself, at least not at the start of her sober journey. "I made a lot of mistakes in the beginning," she admits. "I found my sex drive was really amped up when I got sober – for others, it's the opposite. It gets dulled down. They don't know how to have sex without drugs or alcohol. They don't know how to connect if they're not fucked up or off their head. People said, 'Don't rush into things'. I was like, 'You just took away my medication! I'm here for the exploration.' I had a lot of fun. And a lot of sadness and disconnect. I was gaslighting and shaming myself. 'You fucked up, you're a slut.' All of that narrative. They're old voices – they came from somewhere else. But I'm the one doing that to myself now."

A younger version of myself wouldn't have believed it was possible to be sober and sexual, but it absolutely is, Rose says. "Just because you get sober and clean doesn't mean it has to be boring and you have to disconnect from that part of yourself. That's why I say it's political. I had this idea that I was free. I was up 'til six am, gurning my tits off in a club, being really wild and making out with everybody. That's what I thought was freedom. But actually, when I got sober and clean, I realised the freedom I possessed by being intimate with self is a whole 'nother world. Because I get to do this conscious and safely. Without sounding massively wanky," she laughs, "I found meditation really helpful. It helped me get in touch with and get comfortable with all of those parts of myself. Learning to communicate and not shaming myself. If I have a kink and I'm into it, advocating for that, and seeking my community in that."

Queer and kink communities, Rose believes, are welcoming places for sober people, allowing those who don't use drugs or alcohol to explore their sexuality in a safe space. "We don't need to be all squeaky clean.

Rose recommends...

#### 4 INSTA ACCOUNTS TO FOLLOW

@yourdiagnosense  
@somaticwitch

@she\_recovers  
@lovesober.cic

We get to live free and show up for ourselves 100%. If you still want to go out and do all the shit you were doing, you can. Life doesn't stop because you're sober. You get to choose now. I'm sure as hell going to do what the fuck I want in my sober life. I don't want to hurt people, I don't want to be an arsehole, I don't want to lie... But I'm going to live my life."

“The freedom I possessed by being intimate with self is a whole 'nother world”

Of course, there might be partners, friends and family who aren't on board with your decisions. But Rose advises advocating for yourself. "Some people were super understanding. And some people just dropped off. No, I'm not going to buzz around Paris with you in the back of your car smoking coke. I'm just not down for that. If I wanted to do that, I could have, but I felt like there had to be a house-cleaning of people. It's that Marie Kondo thing: 'Is this person sparking joy?' No they're fucking not. Make space for something else."

Examining your relationship with alcohol, and your relationship with self, doesn't just lead to better sex, though. It might just save your life. "I'm not sure I would still be here," Rose tells me matter-of-factly when I ask how different her life might look had she not made the decision eight years ago to get sober. "The denial was so thick in me. I thought I was making really savvy lifestyle choices but my body was very sick. I had hepatitis of the liver and I was ignoring self on every level. I had some gnarly shit happen at the end and I don't want to ever go back to that." **D**

*If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, see our resources box. Sober Sex is available wherever you get your podcasts. Follow Rose on Instagram @rosieromain*

## RESOURCES

AA  
[alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

Antidote  
[londonfriend.org.uk/antidote-drugs-alcohol](http://londonfriend.org.uk/antidote-drugs-alcohol)

Substance Misuse Service  
[lgbt.foundation/substancemisuse](http://lgbt.foundation/substancemisuse)

Club Soda  
[joinclub soda.com](http://joinclub soda.com)

We Are With You  
[wearewithyou.org.uk](http://wearewithyou.org.uk)