

icky-pedia

FML

WHY DID I
SLEEP WITH
HIM??

OH SHIT

You know what you'd say if you found out you had a sexually transmitted infection. Maybe you've said it already, given the numbers. A CDC report found rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis have steadily risen in recent years (some as much as

15 percent), with half of all new STI cases occurring in people ages 15 to 24. Not enough of us are getting vaccines or STI tests either...maybe because we're all paralyzed with fear.

The freak-out stops here. STIs may be common, but they

are also preventable, treatable, and not nearly as life-scarring as we tend to imagine. Cosmo compiled this guide—think of it as an extremely modern encyclopedia—to give you the details no one else will. Get informed, then go get busy.

BY KELLY MICKLE
portraits by Andrew Hetherington

GETTY IMAGES

??

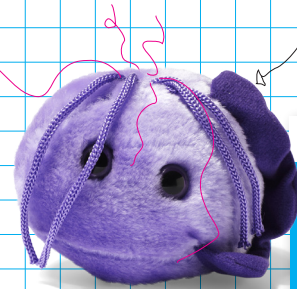
icky
DICKS

[FIG 1]

WHO'S WHO

Having an STI will not ruin your life. Most can be cured, and chronic, incurable forms can be managed when caught early. The key is to know your stuff.

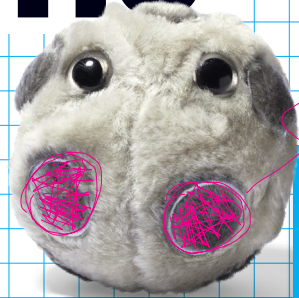
SUPER COMMON



TRICHOMONIASIS (aka trich)

This tiny parasite can cause irritation and inflammation of the genitals. Left untreated, chronic inflammation can increase your risk for other STIs.

WHO HAS IT: 1 million new diagnoses in the United States each year.*
HOW YOU GET IT: Sexual intercourse and vulva-to-vulva contact.
RX: A single antibiotic dose cures you.

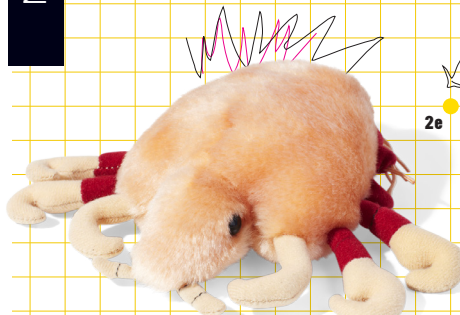


HPV

Genital Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infects the skin, causing abnormal cell changes that can lead to cervical cancer.

WHO HAS IT: 14 million
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
RX: There's no cure, but the immune system clears most cases within a year or two. Follow-up Pap tests—as rec'd by your MD—catch signs of pre-cancers before they turn into something serious.

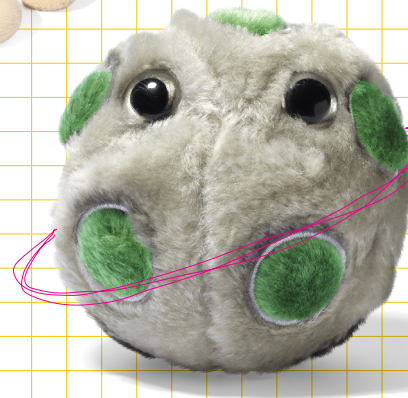
NO BIGGIE



PUBIC LICE (aka crabs)

These tiny insects (gulp) infest the pubic hair, suck your blood, and lay eggs. They itch like crazy.

WHO HAS IT: Experts say crabs are waning, thanks to a recent increase in below-the-belt shaving and waxing.
HOW YOU GET IT: Sexual activity, but it can also be passed through contact with linens and clothes.
RX: OTC creams and lotions kill the insects and their eggs.



GENITAL WARTS

These cauliflower-ish bumps—which can turn up on the anus and inside and outside the vagina—are caused by a less common strain of HPV that isn't associated with cancer. They're itchy but usually painless.

WHO HAS IT: 360,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Sexual intercourse and vulva-to-vulva contact.
RX: There's no cure, but warts—and the virus—can clear on their own within a couple of years.

To lower your risk for all STIs, take care of your immune system. * Sleep at least 7 hours a night * Go easy on junk food and booze. * Never smoke! * Get the HPV and hep B vaccines.

SOURCE: JEFFERY KLAUSNER, MD, PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

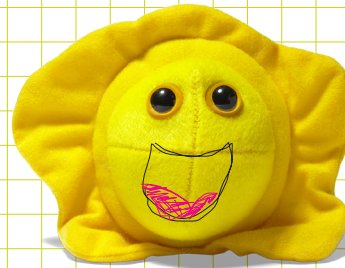
SUPER RARE

* All numbers are new diagnoses in the U.S. each year, according to a 2013 report by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

GONORRHEA (aka the clap)

A bacterial infection that can cause pelvic pain, inflammation, and vaginal discharge but often has no symptoms. It can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility if left untreated.

WHO HAS IT: 820,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
RX: Doctors prescribe a combination of injectable and oral antibiotics over seven days.



HERPES

A virus grouped into two types—HSV-1 and HSV-2—herpes can cause painful outbreaks on the mouth, vagina, penis, rectum, and butt cheeks, which make you more vulnerable to other STIs. In rare cases, herpes leads to viral meningitis and can

be passed to a baby during childbirth.
WHO HAS IT: 776,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex; type 1 can also be spread via kissing.
RX: It's incurable, but a daily pill can prevent outbreaks.



SYPHILIS (aka the pox)

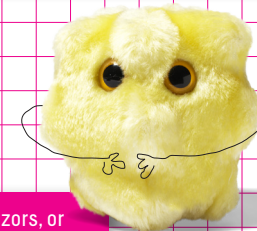
A bacterial disease said to have plagued Beethoven and van Gogh, syphilis can damage the heart and nervous system if left untreated. The telltale symptom is a painless sore or sores. It may progress to a red pocklike rash.

WHO HAS IT: 55,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Contact with a syphilis sore during vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
RX: Antibiotics can cure it.

SUPER GONORRHEA

Like other bacteria, gonorrhea is mutating: A new strain is resistant to four of the antibiotics once used to cure it. Overuse of antimicrobials in medical care, farming, and products may play a role.

WHO HAS IT: 246,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
RX: New treatment guidelines—an injectable drug and an oral dose of a second antibiotic—are working.



HEP B

A virus that affects the liver and often leads to chronic liver disease. Symptoms are fatigue, fever, jaundice, dark urine, nausea, and abdominal pain.

WHO HAS IT: 19,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex as well as sharing

needles, razors, or toothbrushes with an infected person.
RX: The immune system sometimes fights off the infection within six months of exposure. Chronic cases are treated with lifelong medication and by cutting back on alcohol.



CHLAMYDIA

Most people notice no symptoms, but you could experience pelvic pain, burning during urination, and vaginal discharge. Without medication, chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

WHO HAS IT: 2.8 million
HOW YOU GET IT: Oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
RX: Easily cured with a one- or seven-day course of antibiotics.



HIV

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) attacks the immune system and may feel like a bad case of the flu. The advanced stage is acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

WHO HAS IT: 41,000
HOW YOU GET IT: Vaginal and anal sex and sharing needles; less commonly, oral sex, contact with open wounds.
RX: There's no cure, but new meds—while pricey—allow people to live longer, healthier lives.



CAN YOU GET LYME DISEASE FROM SEX?

New research shows that a tick bite may not be the only way to get Lyme disease, the illness that can cause fatigue, pain, and nervous-system damage. It may be sexually transmitted too.

"There are more than 300,000 new cases of Lyme disease diagnosed each year, but not all ticks have Lyme disease and it shows up in areas with few reports of infected ticks," says Raphael Stricker, MD, a lead researcher in the *Journal of Investigative Medicine* study.

His team studied vaginal secretions and semen from people with and without Lyme. The presence of living Lyme bacteria, called spirochetes, in the genital secretions would mean that the bacteria could be passed on through those secretions—strong evidence for a sexually transmitted infection. The spirochete—an extremely mobile, corkscrew-shaped organism—is also the agent of syphilis, "the granddaddy of STIs," says Dr. Stricker. "Clinically, the diseases are similar in many ways."

The researchers did find Lyme spirochetes in the genital secretions of patients who had the disease. And in married couples with Lyme not using condoms, they found the same strain of spirochete, suggesting one partner infected the other. With more than 100 strains of Lyme spirochetes in the U.S., the likelihood of both partners being bitten by ticks with the same strain is very low, says Dr. Stricker. Studies also have shown Lyme disease is sexually transmitted in animals.

"Until we can say for sure that Lyme disease is an STI, we can at least try to minimize its spreading," Dr. Stricker says. Fever, fatigue, joint pain, and limb numbness are the most common symptoms. And early detection is crucial to ensure Lyme doesn't progress to affect the nervous system or heart. Lyme disease is treated with oral or intravenous antibiotics. Anyone with a partner who has, had, or may have the disease should get tested.

—MARISSA GAINSBURG

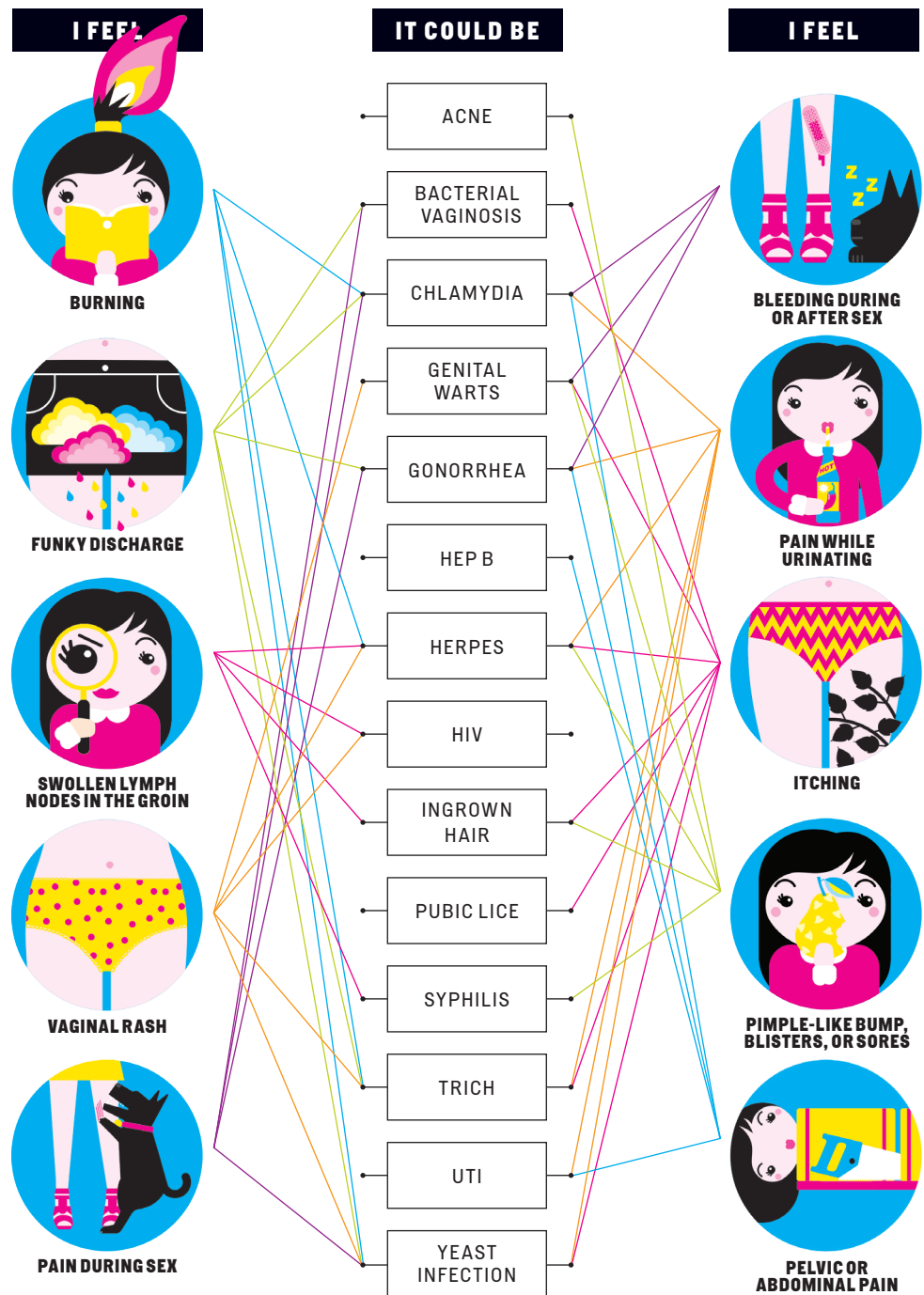


PRETTY SERIOUS

JON PATERSON/ISTUDIO D

SYMPTOMS

Not all bumps, odors, and itches signify an STI (phew). When in doubt, visit your gyno.



SOURCES: JENNIFER ASHTON, MD; CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION; MAYO CLINIC

The Tests

KNOW YOUR STATUS
Insurance has to cover screenings for free—thanks, Affordable Care Act! If you're uninsured or your provider pushes back, Planned Parenthood has gratis testing.

FOR YOU...

Pap test: A cell sample, which your doctor takes from your cervix with a Q-tip-like tool, is tested for precancerous cells linked to HPV.

How often? Every five years once you're 21, say U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines; yearly if you've tested positive for HPV or have multiple partners.

Swab or urine test:

A vaginal sample or urine sample is tested for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trich.

How often? Yearly, even if you're monogamous. (Some boyfriends cheat.) Every six months if you have multiple partners.

FOR HIM...

Urine test: It checks for chlamydia and gonorrhea. It's not routine: He needs to request it.

How often? Yearly, or every six months if he has multiple partners, says Dr. Rompalo.

FOR BOTH OF YOU...

Blood test: It checks for HIV, hep B, herpes, and syphilis. This test is not always routine, so be sure to ask for it.

How often? Dr. Ashton recs every 6 to 12 months if you have multiple partners.

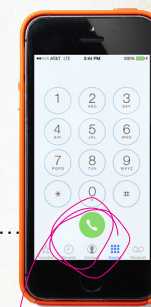
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LUCY VIGRASS

icky Pedia
VIRAL MEDIA OF STIS

Danah Abar, (32) SEATTLE, WA

"When my Pap test came back abnormal, I remembered I'd just had a weird yeast infection and odd bumps on my bikini line, which I thought were ingrown hairs. I learned they were warts, and I also had HPV on my cervix. At first, I wanted to hold someone accountable for what happened. It just made me suffer more.... You have to let go. I looked for support groups online, but I just came across scary images and stories. So I started HPV Hope (HPVHope.com), a forum where people can share stories, talk about fears, and support one another. The more I shared my story and heard others', the easier it was to accept my diagnosis as a normal part of my life."

I HAD GENITAL WARTS (AND SUPPORT)



AWKWARD DELIVERING THE NEWS

Hi,
(hookup's name)

I feel
(adjective)

making this call,
but I need to tell you
this. I just found
out that I have

(STI name)

You should get tested
and possibly treated.

Hope your day
gets better!

TIME-OUT

How long you need to wait before jumping back in the sack after an STI diagnosis... and how to keep your partner safe.

CHLAMYDIA

Who to Tell
Current partners, partners in the last two months
Waiting Period
A week after your 1-day Rx or the day after your 7-day Rx.

GENITAL WARTS*

Who to Tell
Current and future partners
Waiting Period
Avoid sexual contact when lesions are present.

GONORRHEA

Who to Tell
Current partners, partners in the last two months
Waiting Period
Wait a week after finishing your antibiotics.

HEP B*

Who to Tell
Current and future partners, partners in last year
Waiting Period
Get your doc's okay. Treatment minimizes spreading.

HERPES*

Who to Tell
Current and future partners, partners in last year
Waiting Period
No sex when sores are visible. Antiviral meds can help.

HIV*

Who to Tell
Current and future partners, partners in last year
Waiting Period
Wait until starting treatment and have your doctor's okay.

HPV*

Who to Tell
Current partners
Waiting Period
None, but use protection since the virus can be ping-ponged back and forth.

PUBIC LICE

Who to Tell
Current partners
Waiting Period
No skin-to-skin contact until 7 days after treatment.

SYPHILIS

Who to Tell
Current partners, partners in last year
Waiting Period
Wait a week after antibiotic treatment.

TRICH

Who to Tell
Current partners, partners in the last two months
Waiting Period
No sex for a week after finishing your antibiotics.

Condoms* are a MUST with these diagnoses!

icky-pedia

STIGMA

The judgment of and shame felt by people with STIs, women especially. **Claire Gilbertsen** experienced it firsthand—and learned to work through it.

The summer I turned 25, I met a guy with young Mick Jagger levels of sex appeal. He was irresistible—one of those troubled man-boys who make your brain shout *No!* and your body scream *Yes!* Eventually, one night, I found myself sitting on his face, naked, per his request.

Oral sex was all we had that night. But a few days later, I noticed things were amiss. It felt like I had a cut on my clitoris, it hurt to pee, I felt a burning sensation, and I had a discharge. Then I found 8 or 10 sores near my labia. They looked like ingrown hairs but couldn't be popped, and they had a red, irritated ring around a white center.

I panicked. I Googled. I spiraled quickly. I couldn't bring myself to tell any friends, but a couple of days later, I went to see a gynecologist.

The doctor confirmed my worst fear: I had herpes. As the tears

streamed, all I could think was that I was now unlovable and unfuckable.

I called Mick Jagger, furious and anxious, my stomach in knots. When I asked if he had any STIs, he said no. When I asked if he had herpes, he responded casually, "Oh, yeah, but just oral herpes." And that was it. Although he didn't have any visible sores on his mouth (or genitals), he gave me oral herpes on my vagina. Oh, and he didn't think we should see each other again.

I went into a tailspin of feeling dirty, worthless, and hopeless. People like me, I thought, *don't get STIs*. I went to Wellesley. I am well-educated about sexual health, and I use condoms. I wear pearl earrings!

The worst part wasn't the disease itself; it was the shame. I consider myself progressive and open-minded, but when it came to herpes, I couldn't see past the stereotypes. I kept thinking about friends who were more promiscuous than I'd ever been and wondering how I was the girl who ended up with herpes. I felt ruined. I started drinking more, isolated myself from everyone, and even quit my job.

The first time I found out a friend had herpes too, I was so relieved to talk

and laugh about it that I cried. It was a breakthrough. I started talking about my herpes more openly and began pulling my life back together. The memory of that one-night stand stopped overwhelming me with regret.

Since then, I've come to think of herpes as a litmus test for potential romantic partners. I've heard every kind of response.

The weird: "Can you get herpes on your fingers?"

The callous: "Don't tell people that so quickly after meeting them. They won't want to date you."

The naïve: "Well I guess that just means the next person you sleep with is the person you'll have to marry."

But some guys are so sweet, saying, "Wow, that must have been hard for you. Are you okay?" And my favorite: "I don't care. I still want to fuck you."

I still get anxious when I tell a new partner, wondering if I know him well enough to confide that I have herpes, nervous he'll run in the other direction, certain this is the deal breaker. But that hasn't happened. And I've realized that if someone does run away, he's not the kind of man I want to have sex with anyway. *He doesn't deserve me.* ■



I Have herpes AND a love life

Why wouldn't he tell me??

TECH SUPPORT!

Struggling with your status? Know that STIs are extremely common, and you're not alone. Visit ASHASexualHealth.org to find a support group.

LESBIANS

Yes, Women Who Like Women Get STIs Too

"Anytime you exchange bodily fluids, there is a risk for sexually transmitted infections—straight, lesbian, trans, or bisexual," says Anne Rompalo, MD, professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "Oral sex and sex toys can transmit everything from HPV to chlamydia to herpes." Your sexual orientation doesn't make you less (or more) likely to get an STI. Be safe, no matter who your partner is.

1. Wash your hands before and after getting intimate to avoid spreading bacteria to or from your genitals.
2. For oral sex, use a dental dam or DIY one. Cut the tip off a condom, then cut down one side to create a rectangle shape.
3. Clean sex toys before and after each use. Don't want to kill the mood by cleaning mid-romp? Get a toy for both of you, or use a fresh condom for each of you.



THIS WON'T HELP

DOUCHES "They can alter levels of healthy bacteria and increase the risk of infection," warns Cosmo contributor Jennifer Ashton, MD, an ob-gyn.

SOAP Sudsing around or inside your vagina—even with antibacterial soap—can cause skin reactions or disrupt healthy microbes.

SELF-TREATMENT Don't borrow meds from a friend. Antibiotics can't treat viral infections like HPV, herpes, and HIV. Plus, misusing antibiotics fuels hard-to-treat superbugs.

A HOT SHOWER Rinsing off may make you feel squeaky clean, but it can't prevent STIs after the fact.



THIS WILL HELP

YOUR GYNO You may need a test or preventive medication. "If you don't know your partner's STI status, your MD may prescribe antibiotics to prevent chlamydia and gonorrhea or a prophylaxis to prevent HIV," says Dr. Ashton.

PLAN B Take emergency contraception (it's OTC at drugstores, or get an

Rx for Ella from a doctor) right away to prevent unwanted pregnancy.

A SYMPTOM CHECK Call your doc if you have any unusual pain, bleeding, discharge, or itching.

REPEAT TESTING Some viruses and bacteria don't show up right away, so test again a few months after exposure.

PROTECTION

Aka condom, rubber, Jimmy hat, cock sock, raincoat, love glove...

...and the thing you never have sex without. (Right? Good!) But to get the most STI-proofing benefits, you must use them *correctly*. These fails, ID'd by an Indiana University study, are condom Kryptonite.

YOU USED THE WRONG KIND... Words like *novelty* or *for entertainment purposes* mean it's not FDA-approved. Latex is best, or polyurethane if you're allergic.

...OR THE WRONG LUBE. Oils and petroleum jelly can damage latex, so only use with water-based lubes. The word *oil* on the label

means it's not latex-safe. P.S. Saliva is a safe, free lubricant.

YOU DIDN'T EXAMINE IT. Check the expiration date. And don't use a discolored, torn, or brittle condom.

YOU LET HIM PUT IT ON. "Women often assume the guy will take care of it, and we don't pay close attention to how it's done," says Dr. Ashton. Get in the driver's seat!

YOU UNROLLED IT FIRST. That can cause breakage. Pinch the tip so there's room for semen but no air. Now roll it down the shaft, gently squeezing out air bubbles.

IT WENT ON TOO LATE. "He has to wear it the whole time—even before penetration—to keep you both protected," says Dr. Ashton.

IT STAYED ON TOO LONG. Take it off right after ejaculation when he's hard—hold the base as you slide it off to prevent semen spillage.

YOU RECYCLED. It went on wrong? Don't try again with the same condom—you could swap fluids.

TECH SUPPORT!

The Condom Pro app (free, iTunes.com) pretty much earns you a PhD in application as you practice on random objects.

BEN GOLDSTEIN/STUDIO D

I HAD CHLAMYDIA

Sara Wasylyk (21) PHILADELPHIA, PA

A week and a half after having sex with a guy friend, he called me and said, "We have to talk." I thought I was going to throw up—I just knew he was going to say he'd given me an STI. He said he got chlamydia from a girl who got it from her boyfriend, who'd cheated on her. I freaked out and was crying and asked a close friend to go with me to the clinic at school, where I tested positive. I took two antibiotic pills the doctor prescribed, and they cleared it up completely, thankfully.

It changed how I think about sex. I used to assume that if he didn't bring up an STI, then he was clean. I used to not be a fan of condoms. I used to only get tested for STIs once a year, even though I have sex with a lot of different guys. Now I get tested every few months, I always use condoms, and I always ask the guy I'm sleeping with "When were you last tested?" Before I hook up, I think, *Wait, here's the checklist of things to go over before we have sex.* It's awkward, but having sex with somebody is always kind of awkward at first. You have to make it as safe as you can.



Peter Adams (19) ST. AUGUSTINE, FL

I dated Sara about five months after she had been treated, and she told me about it the first time we hung out. I've never hooked up with a woman with an STI...that I know of. She was so open about how she got it and how she dealt with it that I trusted her immediately when she said she was cured and I couldn't get it.

I AM HIV+

Maria Mejia (41)
Lisa Laing (43)

MIAMI, FLORIDA
married six months

Maria: I've been HIV positive since I was 16 years old. I got it from the first guy I had sex with, back before I was comfortable with my sexuality and out.

Lisa: We became friends over MySpace. The connection was just as strong when we met in person.

Maria: After a while, I knew I was in love with her. I knew I had to tell her my secret. It took me a few hours over Yahoo messenger to get it out!

Lisa: I told her, "I don't care. I love you." That was seven years ago, and we just got married in May.

Maria: I take antiviral pills every single day, which drastically reduces the risk of me passing it on, and we use dental dams for oral sex.

Lisa: The hardest part is seeing her in pain. Because her immune system is weak, sometimes little stuff like bronchitis will send her to the hospital.

Maria: The first time she saw me on oxygen, she cried. But she's my rock. She's my angel, caretaker, and the love of my life.

JENELLE MARIE DAVIS (32) NICK KAROLIONOK (33)

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
dating four years

JENELLE: The first time we had sex, it was after a few drinks. We used condoms and I wasn't mid-outbreak, but I didn't tell him I had herpes.

NICK: It wasn't on her mind that night!

J: I felt so incredibly guilty that I hadn't told him. I knew I wanted to have a long-term relationship with him, and he needed to know.

N: THREE DAYS LATER, SHE TEXTED ME THAT SHE HAD TO TELL ME SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

J: It's never easy telling a partner. I was so worried that even though I knew he thought I was attractive and intelligent and we had chemistry, he'd run scared.

N: THE ENTIRE TIME, I WAS THINKING, IS SHE PREGNANT?

J: IT WAS A 45-MINUTE DRIVE TO HIS HOUSE.

N: When she told me, I said "So? You're still the same person, aren't you?"

J: The relief was amazing.

I HAVE HERPES. HE DOESN'T.

N: I did research and wasn't scared. I served in Iraq, so I know what real risk is! As long as we avoided sex during outbreaks, my risk was really low.

J: ABOUT A MONTH LATER, I GOT AN OUTBREAK. I HATED HAVING TO SAY, "IT'S NOT A GOOD TIME TO HAVE SEX."

N: Now I even help her put on bandages when she has outbreaks.

N: I never think about her having herpes during sex.

J: We use condoms and don't have sex if I have an outbreak. I get them on my butt cheeks—I know as soon as they're gone.

Founder of TheSTDProject.com



That thing that conquers all, including any infection.