



How To Ask A New Partner If They Have An STI (Without It Being Weird)

Sexual health experts share their best advice on having a conversation about STDs and safe sex with your partner.

By Brittany Wong. May 16, 2019



We get it: No one likes to talk about sexually transmitted infections. If things are getting hot and heavy, nothing tosses a bucket of cold water over a sexual encounter quite like saying “STI.”

But in the age of super gonorrhea, it’s super important we have these conversations. Last year, we heard the first reports of super gonorrhea, a strain of the disease so gnarly it’s resistant to the antibiotic drugs usually prescribed to treat it. Oh, joy.

That’s not the only STI you have to worry about. The U.S. has the highest STI rates in the industrialized world, and it’s only getting worse. Nearly 2.3 million cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis were diagnosed in the U.S. in 2017, surpassing the record set in 2016 by more than 200,000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in August. (FYI: We’re using STI here as opposed to STD because not all sexually transmitted infections turn into a disease.)

“It’s scary because a shockingly high percentage of Americans know little, if anything, about STDs and STIs,” said **Robert Huizenga**, a physician and the author of “Sex, Lies and STDs.” “Few people have any idea what early STD symptoms to look out for, even if symptoms do occur, because many STDs present with no symptoms.”

Don’t think, “we’re using a condom, we’re good!”



If you're using a condom, you're playing it a lot safer than those who rely on the pullout method alone. But just because you slipped on a rubber doesn't mean you're free and clear. (Sorry!)

As Huizenga told us, condoms alone are effective at preventing STIs that are transmitted through bodily fluids, like gonorrhea and chlamydia, but they provide less protection against those that spread through skin-to-skin contact, like human papillomavirus (genital warts), genital herpes and syphilis.

He tells patients who are single or have multiple partners to get comprehensive screenings done on a yearly or biyearly basis.

That makes having the pre-sex talk so much easier; If you've been recently tested, you can offer up your own test results to normalize the experience or make your partner feel less shy about doing it themselves.

"When partners fully disclose STD status — even exchanging recent lab testing — it provides clear informed consent on multiple levels," Huizenga said. "In the spirit of honesty, equality and transparency, I think both partners should exchange this information prior to intimacy."

Take a deep breath: This conversation is probably going to go over better than you think.

This is obviously a heavy, potentially uncomfortable topic, but if handled with casualness and tact, it'll probably play out a lot smoother than you expect. (Plus, major brownie points for being so sexually responsible.)

"Shockingly, I have had patient after patient tell me how surprised they were about how well received these open pre-sex talk was by prospective partners," Huizenga said. "Counterintuitively, it didn't kill the mood, it actually made them more, not less, sexually desirable."

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