Dear Alice,

When my boyfriend and I began our sexual relationship, he insisted on using condoms. I gratefully agreed because I felt it then wouldn't be necessary for me to tell him about my STD?herpes. Now, two months later he's decided that he "trusts" me enough to stop using the condoms. I don't see any way I can keep the relationship, even if he can handle the STD part, if I tell him I've been lying over the past two months. Do you have any advice? I don't want to lose him, but I don't want to be responsible for giving him any diseases either.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Sounds like you're dealing with a number of difficult issues. For one, you may still be adjusting to the idea of having herpes?accepting the fact that this virus will be with you for the rest of your life, understanding how the virus "works," and learning how to manage herpes. At the same time, you're struggling with how to tell your partner about your herpes. On top of these already overwhelming issues, you may be dealing with feelings of guilt about having herpes and about not telling your boyfriend; anxiety about telling him and his reaction; and, fear of rejection.

First of all, it's important to stop beating yourself up over not telling your boyfriend about your herpes sooner. It takes a great deal of courage (and even practice) to be able to tell others, especially a new partner. You can't change the fact that you didn't tell him before you started having sex, but you can begin to think constructively about how to deal with the situation you're in right now. And, you can learn from what has happened to prevent similar situations in the future.

You don't have to immediately tell a potential partner about your herpes. However, if you think you'll become sexually active with someone, you do have a responsibility to let that person know, even if you plan on using condoms (condoms do not cover all of the skin that could potentially transmit herpes). Not telling can lead to an increased risk of infection for your partner, and possible spread to others (if the two of you break up and become involved with other people). Not telling can also cause you the feelings of guilt and fear that you are already experiencing.

In the future, it would be wise to bring the subject up with a new partner well before you become sexually intimate. Use some variation of the following statement to get the ball rolling:
"Before we become intimate, we need to talk about some things, like STIs and contraception. The reason I'm bringing this up is that I have herpes. You need to know about it, and we need to decide how best to protect ourselves..."

People with herpes often find that with time and a better understanding of the disease, telling new partners becomes easier. They also discover that herpes doesn't always affect their intimate relationships and sex lives as much as they originally feared it would. There are a number of resources available for you to learn about herpes (listed below). You can also learn to manage the disease, minimizing its impact on your life, with the help of a health care provider who's well-versed in herpes management. If you find yourself overwhelmed with negative thoughts about having herpes, you may find it helpful to keep a journal, or write down your thoughts, and think them through. You could also find a support group, or a counselor, to help you work through your feelings.

A solid base of knowledge about herpes can make it easier for you to tell a partner. The more you know, the less you fear; and, the more you can allay your partner's fears. You'll be able to tell him the facts, dispel any myths, and correct any misinformation he may have about herpes.

This is all fine and well, but what about actually getting the words out of your mouth? Of course, you need to decide what you're most comfortable saying, and in what setting. No one script is correct, but the American Social Health Association (ASHA) has some pointers that you might be able to use:

1. Pick a time when both of you will be in reasonably good moods and relaxed for this conversation. Choose a place with few, if any, distractions.
2. Start out on a positive note ("I'm really happy with our relationship..."). This will put him in a positive mindset, and he may respond more agreeably than if you start out saying something like, "I have some really, really bad news..."
3. Your delivery can influence his acceptance of, and reaction to, what you say. If you're calm and collected talking about herpes, he may be, too. If you act like it's the end of the world, he might agree that it is.
4. Allow a conversation to take place, rather than doing all of the talking yourself.

If you can, direct the conversation to include not only herpes, but sexually transmitted infections, their prevention, and/or birth control. Encourage him to ask questions, and to let you know what he's thinking and feeling. Let him know you're concerned about him, and that you're willing to find a way to make your relationship work, if he is. Also, realize that you'll probably need to talk about this more than once before things are resolved.

After you've said what you need, be aware that you will not be able to control his reaction. That's why your delivery is so important?try to influence how he'll hear what you're telling him. He might need time to himself at first; he might want to break up right then and there; or, he might take the news fairly well. Whatever his reaction, know that he has a right to his feelings and to the time needed to sort them out.

A few resources you and your boyfriend may find helpful:

**Health Care and Counseling**

- Planned Parenthood [3]
  1.800.230.PLAN (-7526)
for the clinic nearest you

For Columbia students

- Primary Care Medical Services [4]
  Visit Open Communicator [5] or call x4-2284 for an appointment
- Counseling and Psychological Services [6]
  Call x4-2468 for an appointment

Good luck as you begin this conversation. As scary as it may seem right now, you can hope that it will lead to personal growth and open communication with your boyfriend (or future partners).

Alice!
Category:
Herpes [7]

Related questions

What is herpes? [8]
My mom found my contraceptives! [9]
Testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) [10]
Surprise, my partner gave me herpes! [11]
Scrotum condoms to prevent genital wart transmission? [12]

Published date:
Apr 04, 1997
Last reviewed on:
Apr 08, 2008

Footer menu

- Contact Alice!
  - Content Use
  - Media Inquiries
  - Comments & Corrections
- Syndication & Licensing
  - Licensing Q&As
  - Get Alice! on Your Website
  - Full Site Syndication
  - Link to Go Ask Alice!

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.