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[Home](#) > Cunnilingus and menstruation?

Cunnilingus and menstruation? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

If one has a long-term partner and neither AIDS nor any other STD is a concern, is there any medical reason not to perform cunnilingus on a menstruating woman? My significant other is particularly horny during her period and would love cunnilingus at this time. I am willing but curious.

— Safe

Answer

Dear Safe,

It's great that you are tuned into your significant other's sexual desires! There is some evidence to suggest that sexual desire may, for some women, follow a pattern of arousal that ebbs and, er, peaks at differing intervals during the menstruation cycle. Other research notes that some women experience greater sexual desire during ovulation. But there is a wide range of data out there and many unanswered questions, as well as anecdotal evidence that women may even experience desires for different kinds of sex at different points during the menstruation cycle ^[2]. To speak to your question: as long as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are not a concern, there's very little that poses a risk to your health by performing oral sex on your partner during menstruation.

Menses (the flow that comes out of a woman's body during menstruation) are made up of the cells that line the uterus (called the epithelium), their connective tissue, as well as blood (the uterus is packed with blood vessels so that if fertilization happens, the fertilized egg can begin growth quickly). When the inner lining of the uterus, called the endothelium, sloughs off once a month during menstruation, some of the blood vessels break, and this is why blood is released. If you ingested small amounts of menses or exposed menstrual blood to your mouth (as long as there is no chance of STI or HIV transmission), the risk to your health is low. In the event that your partner may have a yeast infection (regardless of whether she is menstruating or not), it's possible that the yeast could be transmitted to you [3], so that may be something to consider.

Above and beyond discussing infection risk, communication and open dialogue about desire, curiosity, and willingness to experiment go a long way toward creating fulfilling experiences for both parties: so hats off to you for being willing to have the conversation and also looking into safety! As you mention, STI status is a good place to start a conversation about oral sex during menstruation. For example, whether or not you choose to use a dental dam [4] or other barriers could be a part of that discussion. You may opt for a barrier even if there's no perceived threat of STIs. You and your significant other may also decide to talk about other aspects like curiosity and comfort, and even what to do if either one of you stops feeling comfortable at any point during sex.

Here's to staying your Safe self while also enjoying each other!

Alice!

Category:

Sexual & Reproductive Health [5]

Menstruation [6]

Sexual Questions [7]

About Oral Sex [8]

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Footer menu

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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/cunnilingus-and-menstruation>
- [2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/sexual-attraction-and-menstrual-cycles>
- [3] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/sexual-transmission-yeast-infection>
- [4] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/better-information-about-dental-dams>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-reproductive-health>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/menstruation>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-questions>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/about-oral-sex>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/monogamous-couple-stop-using-condoms-0>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/cold-sores-vs-canker-sores-%E2%80%94-oral-sex-risks>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/where-can-i-get-dams-oral-sex-0>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/taste-woman>
- [13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/blowing-air-vagina-dangerous>