Dear Alice,

I enjoy performing cunnilingus on my girlfriend, and every so often, I get a sore throat. My question is, is it all right to perform cunnilingus on my girlfriend if I have a sore throat? Or is there a chance that whatever causing my throat discomfort could cause her trouble as well? Can the “giver” of oral sex pass along sore throat germs to the “receiver”? 

Thanks very much,

— Sore throat

Answer

Dear Sore throat,

Although there are many things that can be transmitted directly through unprotected oral sex, your sore throat is probably not one of them. Most sore throats are caused by viruses like the common cold or flu. These germs get into your body via the nose or mouth, so it's safe to say that your partner's vagina cannot "catch a cold" if you go down on her when you have a sore throat. You can pass along your sore throat germs by kissing, touching, or holding her close to you during sexual activity though. Just to be safe, you might want to keep your face away from hers until your sore throat goes away.

There is also a possibility that your sore throat might be caused by an STI if your partner has one and you don't use a barrier such as a condom or dental dam. For example, performing oral sex on a partner who is infected with gonorrhea can lead to gonorrhea of the throat. A sore throat is a common sign of an oral STI, along with tonsillitis, oral lesions, or cold sores. If you find that you are experiencing these symptoms regularly after performing oral sex, you may want to see your health care provider for testing and treatment. In the meantime, check out Wake up with morning throat aches [2] in the Go Ask Alice! archives for ways to soothe your throat.

Alice!

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