

Misdiagnosed with herpes? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Five years ago, I set up an appointment to visit my gyno because I was having discomfort in my genital area. I assumed it was a yeast infection or urinary tract infection. When I went to my appt., I was given an exam and told that it was possibly herpes. I was then told to go to the local hospital to take a blood test and within a few days, I was told my results would be in. A few days after I took the blood test, I received a call for my gyno.'s office and told to come in so I could be told my results. She told me that it came back positive and right then and there diagnosed me with Genital Herpes. I was never given any type of medication to treat my so-called Herpes outbreak and as I sit here FIVE years later, I can honestly tell you that I have had no discomfort since and no symptoms whatsoever of Herpes. What are the odds of me being misdiagnosed? What are the odds of not having one outbreak in five years?? This is very important to me because I am seeing someone new (when this all happened I was in a long term relationship and we have now broken up). I don't want to become sexually active with my new partner until I am 100% positive that I have this disease because I'm not going to pour my heart out and scare him away if in fact I don't even have it. Would I be overreacting if I went to a different clinic and didn't mention to them that I have already been diagnosed and requested a STD test to see how the results come back? I really appreciate your time and help. Thank you!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Some people with herpes are asymptomatic; they do not have symptoms. Women can have internal outbreaks along the vaginal barrel or on the cervix, yet it seems to them that they are symptom-free. Other people can have outbreaks and mistake them for something else, such as insect bites, razor burn, jock itch, or ingrown hair follicles. Recurrent episodes are usually less severe than the initial outbreak and do not last as long, which may be why these episodes are easily missed. And some people do not get recurrences.

Herpes is most easily diagnosed when blisters are present. When you are asymptomatic and take a blood test, the test looks for antibodies that fight the virus. While these tests are fairly accurate, tests can have false positive rates. Newer tests are more reliable than older tests; they can differentiate between Herpes Type 1 (oral herpes) and Herpes Type 2 (genital herpes).

However, even in the newer tests, false positives can occur around 5 percent of the time.

It is understandable, and responsible of you, to want to check your health status before becoming sexually active with your new partner. Generally, testing for sexually transmitted infections while asymptomatic is not suggested. However, if you truly feel you may have been misdiagnosed, you can talk with your health care provider or the local health clinic about taking a new test. You may even want to contact your gynecologist and inquire if the test you took could distinguish between Type 1 and Type 2 herpes. Be open about your previous test results and that you've been symptom-free since then. You can also talk with the provider about the likelihood of transmission in a case like yours. All of this information can help you decide about and frame a discussion with a potential partner.

Herpes or not, an open discussion with a new partner about previous sexual experiences and even getting tested together before becoming intimate makes sense.

If another blood test for herpes confirms your initial diagnosis, the Related Q&As can help you better understand asymptomatic herpes. You also might get ideas about having this kind of talk with your potential partner. As difficult as it may be to initiate this conversation, you'll learn more about yourself and about the other person. This information might encourage you to move forward into this new relationship or experience, or it may cause you to close the door on this one. Remember, you have choices.

Alice!

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