

NSFW^(ish)

NSFW(ish) is a weekly newsletter on sex, love, and relationships (and oh, so much more!), brought to you by SHAPE, Health, InStyle, and HelloGiggles.

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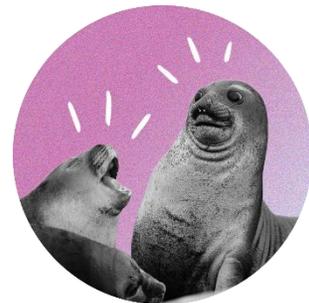


ASKING FOR A FRIEND



I kick it over to Dr. Gaither and Dr. Loanzon to field your questions, while I bookmark content to consume tonight—and the next night, and the one after that...

I've never been tested, and haven't had any issues with STIs. My new partner says they won't have sex with me until I get screened. TBH, I'm kind of freaked out by someone looking...down there. What happens in a test, anyway? Is it really that important?



Yes, it really is that important. Not to make it about coronavirus, but if we've learned anything from the pandemic, it's the importance of testing. STIs don't always present symptoms, either. And even if you do

have symptoms, you might not be aware of them given their usual real estate. Case in point: Around 90 percent of people with genital herpes don't know they have it, [reports](#) the American Sexual Health Association (ASHA).

What's more, it's in your best interest—regardless of whether you're currently getting busy or not—to have an annual check-in with your ob-gyn to make sure that everything is business as usual down there. In a normal exam, the doctor looks for all sorts of things like signs of ovarian cysts, early indicators for certain types of cancers, and yes, STIs. If you decide to go for a pelvic exam and haven't had one before (or just dread it—welcome to the club!) Loanzon recommends telling your provider so they're cognizant that you might be a little skittish.

Here's what you can expect for your first screening. "You'll have a pelvic exam or a urine test [or both]," says Dr. Loanzon. "You'll be screened for gonorrhea and chlamydia in a urine test or with a swab, and there will likely be blood testing to scan for HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and syphilis," Loanzon details. (Good news: If pelvic exams freak you out, urine tests can be quite accurate on their own, she says.)

At any point of the exam or screening, you are fully entitled to tell your doctor that you're feeling uncomfortable or would rather see someone else, she emphasizes. And if you're feeling extra nervous before or during a pelvic exam, Loanzon suggests practicing deep yoga breaths to relax the pelvic floor—it will also

enable your provider to be more efficient.



Much to my surprise, I got a positive STI diagnosis recently. I'm single—is my love life over? I don't think I could face any new partner with this information.

First off, no, your love life is far from over! Here's the thing: Literally everyone has stuff that's difficult to share, especially with a prospective romantic partner. On a personal note, it's still challenging for me to talk about my former eating disorder with new suitors—and why meal-centric dates aren't my vibe. And that's okay!

By and large, I've found that sharing these types of things (within reason and according to your own comfort level) is easier if you rip off the band-aid in the beginning rather than blindsiding someone with an important fact down the line. And what's more, having an STD—treatable or otherwise—is nothing to be ashamed of.

If you have a curable STI—aka chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis or trichomoniasis—you might be able to get treated before you even meet someone. And if you already have a few dates lined up, keep it PG. "I would recommend abstaining until you're treated—even with condoms, you can risk infection or reinfection," says Dr. Gaither. If you've recently been sexually active with

anyone, inform them so they can be tested and treated as well, she continues.

If things really start getting serious and you have the type of STI that might be around for the long haul (like herpes), it could be worth meeting with your doctor and your S.O. together. This way you can both talk with your provider about all the facts, field questions, learn best practices, and more, says Loanzo.

When you're actually broaching the subject, you can totally admit that you're scared and not entirely sure how to bring up the situation. From there, stick to the facts—you don't need to go into the details, unless the other person asks and you're cool with sharing. And remember, this is in no way a deal breaker for tons of folks. You've got this!