

ask the sexpert

Can sex help menstrual cramps?

Not simple coitus alone. But an orgasm, yes. Many women report that an orgasm — whether arrived at alone or with a partner — reduces cramping as well as lower back pain. Be warned, however, that typically there is a gush of menstrual blood at the moment of orgasm. There is no harm in this, and the total amount of blood lost is not increased, but you may want to take measures to deal with it. A

diaphragm provides an excellent temporary block for the menstrual flow.

Can you tell me about herpes? My girlfriend has it and I am afraid to have any sexual contact with her.

You have a lot of company with this question. Herpes is a virus infection usually transmitted by sexual intimacy, but also may arise spontaneously. There are two closely related kinds of herpes virus, types I and II. In-

fection in the genitals usually is caused by the type II virus. Infection of other body parts — such as cold sores on the lips or nose — usually is caused by the type I virus.

Type II usually is transmitted by vaginal or anal intercourse or oral-genital contact. Symptoms include one or several groups of small, painful bumps or blisters that appear on the sexual organs.

These lesions should be treated by a doctor. They will

disappear spontaneously in one to four weeks, but the virus continues to live in the body. For this reason, the sores may reoccur (just as cold sores do). Presently there is no known cure for herpes, though researchers are actively investigating several leads.

A person is highly contagious when he or she has active sores. Intercourse should be avoided during this time. It is difficult to say how long one is contagious after the sores disappear; pos-

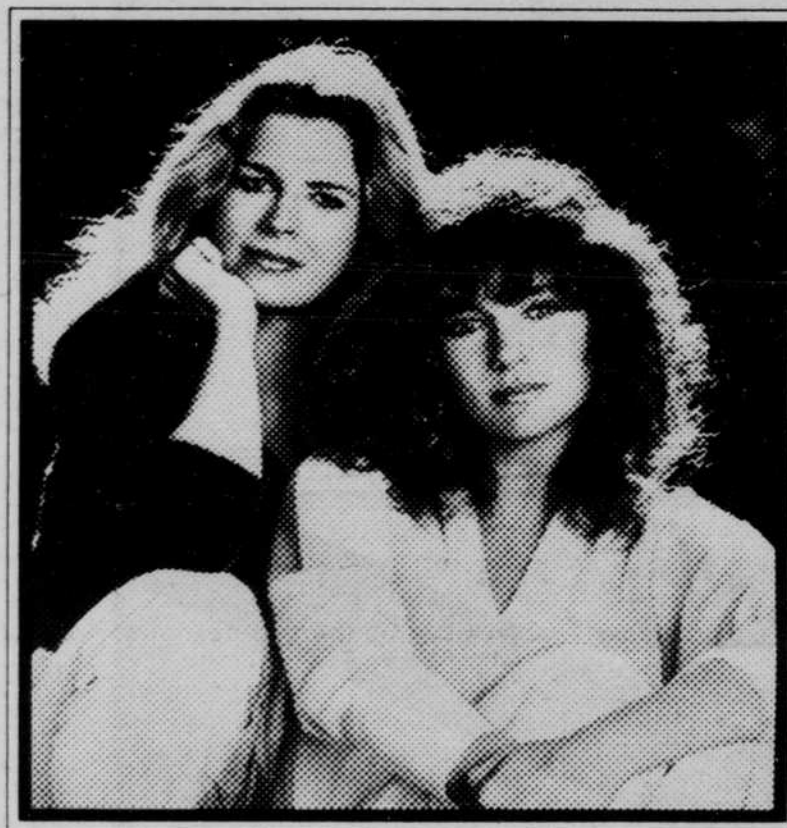
sibly for several weeks.

Most doctors recommend careful use of condoms to reduce the chance of contracting herpes. At the least, condoms should be used for six weeks after the sores have healed. Women occasionally will have herpes sores internally on the cervix, where they are not readily noticed. Symptoms of vaginal discharge, burning or itching usually will alert the woman to a possible outbreak of

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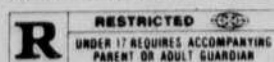
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