

Get tested. Get treated. Get talking about STD safety

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April is Sexually Transmitted Disease Awareness Month

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This spring is GYT – Get Yourself Tested – a national campaign during Sexually Transmitted Disease Awareness Month focused on helping people take control of their sexual health.

It's important to get tested for STDs because not only can it prevent future health problems, but it's also a great way to put your body and yourself first if you're having sex – whether or not you're in a relationship.

Getting tested for STDs is usually quick, easy and painless. For example, rapid HIV tests can provide results in as fast as 20 minutes from just a swab inside the mouth, and many STD tests just require peeing in a cup. Early treatment can help prevent serious, lifelong health problems that can result from untreated STDs. What's more, the results are confidential, and all STDs, even HIV, are treatable if not curable.

In addition to social stigma, there are a number of reasons why people aren't getting tested regularly. Many communities face structural barriers in access to care – especially those with low incomes and those

living in areas with no other affordable or accessible healthcare providers. Often for communities of color, immigrant communities, those living in rural areas, young people, LGBTQ+ communities and others, challenges are compounded when these characteristics overlap.

Many people simply don't know that they need to get tested, but anyone who has had vaginal, anal or oral sex could potentially get an STD. You can't tell by looking at someone if they have an STD or not. You also can't tell if you have an STD based on whether you have symptoms. Most of the time there are no symptoms, so the only way to know for sure is to get tested.

It's a good idea to talk about using condoms or dental dams and getting tested before you start having sex. Having an open and honest conversation can bring you closer, and even make the sex better. (Hello, new and improved sex life!) It doesn't have to be uncomfortable, either. You can start by saying, "I'm a little nervous to bring this up, but I want us to be healthy and I think it's important." Your partner may be so relieved that you brought it up and thrilled at the prospect of hooking up that getting tested will be no big deal.

Unfortunately there is still stigma about STDs and getting tested, but if we all do our part we can end the stigma. Getting an STD or having a partner with an STD is

extremely common. Having an STD is a fairly common result of close contact with other people and is not something anyone should be shamed or judged for. It's normal to not want to make a potential sexy moment into a potentially awkward moment. However, having an STD is not the end of your sex life, and it's nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. Your STD status doesn't make you "clean" or "dirty." What's most important is making sure you have the facts – so no matter what your status is, you can take control of your sexual health.

It's never too late to have these conversations and take charge of your health. If you're not sure where to go for testing or treatment, Planned Parenthood's doors are open to everyone. Throughout GYT, Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette will increase outreach efforts to normalize conversations about STDs, to eliminate stigma and to empower people to take care of their bodies and know their status.

Planned Parenthood believes that all of us – regardless of race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, immigrant or refugee status, or ability to pay – deserve a sex life that is healthy, shame-free and safe. So get yourself talking, get yourself tested, get yourself treated and keep yourself healthy.



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