

Kiss and tell
Sharing your sexual
history

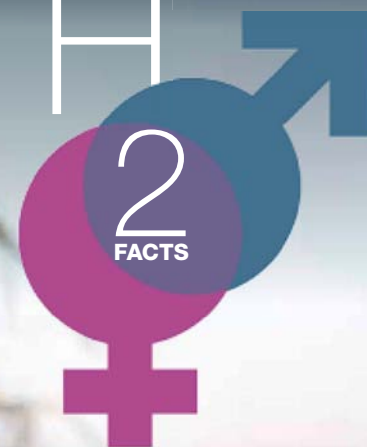
Economic disparities
Reducing the domestic
burden of STDs



**MEDIA
PLANET**

December 2011

SEXUAL HEALTH



TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

Christine Baze, musician and cervical cancer
survivor creates art in the name of public awareness

PHOTO: SADIE DAYTON



Now you've got cervical cancer's number.
Knowing your risk matters. See page 4.

CHALLENGES

Life is a series of choices. The **choice to take care** of our sexual health just happens to be one of our most important.

Normalizing conversations about sex

As important as it is, I don't hear enough people talking about sex. We need to start a national conversation about sexual health, one that goes beyond discussions of teen pregnancy and STDs. These subjects may be important parts of sexual health, but it's much more than that.

Understanding your sexuality

So what does it mean to be sexually healthy? For one, it means knowing about and using the many tools we have to protect our sexual health. We have contraceptives to protect us from unwanted pregnancy, HPV vaccines to protect us from HPV diseases, including cancer. We have tests to find out if we have an STD, and treatment options if we do. And of course we have condoms to help us enjoy and protect ourselves.

But those are just a few of the tools we have.

Being sexually healthy also involves understanding and respecting ourselves. This includes learning how to recognize abuse, either physical or emotional, and how to get help if you need it. It means knowing how to protect your fertility if that's important to you. It includes understanding your own sexual needs and responsibilities.

The key to a positive sexual health framework

There's a lot to talk about and we need to start talking now. We need to be talking with our partners, our spouses, our children, our parents, our healthcare providers, our friends. These conversations aren't always easy at first, but they do get easier. Trust me, I know.

I recently had a conversation with a friend whose husband had died. She had decided to start dating again, and as she and I talked, we realized there was much about

A guide to open discourse

- 1 Don't be afraid to speak openly about your sexual health.
- 2 Understand that sexual health is important no matter how old you are.
- 3 Talk with your health care provider about your sexual history, even if they don't ask.
- 4 Know your risk factors and ask about testing.

Lynn B. Barclay
President and CEO
American Social Health
Association, ASHAstd.org



sexual health she had either never learned or had long forgotten. Sex is healthy and pleasurable but we all have to know how to protect ourselves and our partners, no matter where we are in life's journey.

I hope this report starts a conversation for you. We need more conversations in order to become a sexually healthy nation.

Sexual health is a choice. I choose to be sexually healthy. Do you?

Feel free to contact us at ASHA at sexualhealth@ashastd.org. We'd love to hear your thoughts.

ASHA is America's authority for information on sexual health. Founded in 1914, ASHA is an award-winning and trusted non-profit that specializes in accurate and unbiased sexual health information.

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WE RECOMMEND



Dr. Laura Berman
World renowned sex and relationship expert reveals what's under the covers in America.

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NEWS

It's okay to talk about it

Question: What conversational topic is more fraught than politics?
Answer: Sex.

While working on a sexual health education project, **Tom Beall**, incoming Chairman of the Board of the American Social Health Association, sent an email to a professional colleague. The email filter snagged the message because it contained the words "Sexual Health." This is an amusing example of a serious problem. "Whether we are talking to our partners, our parents, or even our physicians," says Beall, "we are uncomfort-

able talking about sex." It's a discomfort we'd best get over. Candid, non-judgmental conversations about sex can protect our health and sometimes even save our lives.

Teen talk

Talking with kids can be even harder. "Parents often mistakenly believe that if they talk openly with kids about sex, they are implying permission to have sex," says Beall, "but kids don't tend to see it this way." Avoiding the subject may even backfire. "Young people often want to try the things that are forbidden, secret," he points out. Discus-

"Candid, non-judgmental conversations about sex can protect our health and sometimes even save our lives."

STDs
 There are 19 million new cases a year, and most go undiagnosed.

sions with your kids will not only teach them how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, it might give them the maturity they need to make responsible decisions about if and when to have sex.

"Sex is a normal part of adult life. If we want to take care of our health, we must maintain our sexual health as well, even as we age," says Beall. "And we can't do that if we relegate the subject to our spam files."



HEALTH TIPS

Protect yourself and your partner

- Don't depend on your partner to have condoms. Bring your own!
- It's not just about preventing pregnancy. STDs happen. Use condoms and get tested.
- If you have an STD, tell your partner! It's not safe to assume he or she knows it, and treatment may be necessary even without symptoms.

EVERY HURT

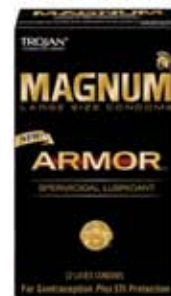
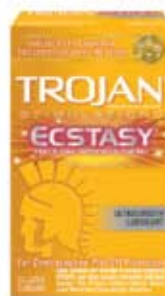
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NEWS



Leandro Mena, MD, MPH
University of Mississippi Medical Center

“A sexually healthy nation could save more than \$36.3 billion a year in health-care costs. That would make a big difference for all of us!”

NEWS IN BRIEF

 **Tearing down health care barriers**

■ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people (LGBT) face many barriers when it comes to health care, explains Jeanne Marrazzo, MD, professor of medicine at the University of Washington.

Only a few states allow same sex marriages and many insurance plans refuse to cover same-sex partners. This puts health care out of reach for many LGBT people. When LGBT patients do get health care, they often find that providers are poorly trained about their particular health concerns and practices aren't always welcoming.

Things are improving, however. More companies are beginning to cover same sex partners and some very traditional organizations, such as the CDC and the HHS, are starting to acknowledge the many varieties of sexual relationships, observes Marrazzo. As our culture changes, so do our attitudes.

AVERY HURT

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NEW DIAGNOSTICS, BETTER CANCER PREVENTION

■ **Question:** What is the most effective method of screening for cervical cancer?

■ **Answer:** Regular Pap tests combined with an HPV test is the most effective method of screening for the virus that causes cervical cancer.

For years, an annual Pap test was considered the best method of screening for and preventing cervical cancer through early detection of precancerous cytology. However, recent studies and recommendations suggest a better method of screening.

According to **Jennifer Smith, Ph.D., MPH**, Director of Cervical Cancer Free America (CCFA), “Approximately one-third of cervical cancer deaths are due to Pap screening errors.” **Dr. Suzanne Trupin**, OB/GYN and CEO of Women's Health Practice, says the Pap test may actually miss up to 50 percent of high-grade cervical disease (or advanced pre-cancer). According to CCFA, combining more sensitive HPV testing with Pap testing may increase the ability to detect precancerous lesions.

“Approximately 20 million Americans are currently infected [with HPV] and at least 50 percent of sexually active men and women will get the virus at some point in their lives. In most cases the body's immune system clears the virus naturally within two years.”

The age of innovation

In fact, data from the ATHENA (Addressing THE Need for Advanced HPV Diagnostics) trial, the largest U.S.-based cervical cancer screening study, recently confirmed the limitations of the Pap test. The study, involving 47,000 women, found that one in ten women, age 30 and older, who tested positive for HPV 16 and/or 18, had cervical pre-cancer even though the results of their Pap test were normal. HPV 16 and 18 are the two most aggressive

strains of the human papillomavirus and are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancers.

Your screening strategy

Though HPV is common (approximately 20 million Americans are currently infected and at least 50 percent of sexually active men and women will get the virus at some point in their lives), in most cases the body's immune system clears the virus naturally within two years. It is only when the immune system does not resolve the virus that it can lead to cancer, and because cervical cancer takes many years to develop, it is a disease that usually affects women only after the age of 30. For this reason, many groups, including the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Cancer Society, and the American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology, recommend the HPV test combined with the Pap as the preferred cervical cancer screening strategy for women over the age of 30.

CHRISTIE CARMELLE LOPEZ

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CHRISTINE BAZE ON THE YELLOW UMBRELLA TOUR
Christine engages, empowers and educates women through song. 100 tour dates later, she continues to spread the message that cervical cancer is preventable.

PHOTOS: SADIE DAYTON



Economic disparities and sexual health

DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE

As with most illnesses, some populations are at greater risk of sexual infections than others. “Fueled by lack of access to care and many social and economic factors, sexually transmitted infections take their

greatest toll on women, youth, and communities of color,” explains Deborah Arrindell, Vice-President of Health Policy for the American Social Health Association. Addressing these inequalities will require attention to many factors, but lack of access to health

care is one of the biggest. “The Affordable Care Act—with its emphasis on prevention and access to care—provides a great opportunity to address these disparities,” says Arrindell. Whatever form health care reform takes, increasing access will be a major step toward

reducing the burden of sexually transmitted diseases.

AVERY HURT

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INSPIRATION

FACT 1
THE FEMALE CONDOM IS THE ONLY BARRIER METHOD OF CONTRACEPTION THAT IS ENTIRELY CONTROLLED BY THE FEMALE



Survivor uses song to save others

Cancer didn't leave Christine Baze singing the blues. Now she's using her voice to help eliminate cervical cancer.

In 2000, after 13 years of normal Pap tests, Christine was diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer. Despite regular screenings, the cancer was found only after her doctor switched from a conventional to a liquid-based cytologic (Pap) test.

Over the next three months, cancer and its ensuing treatments turned Christine's life upside down. Ten days after her diagnosis, she had a radical hysterectomy followed by radiation treatments and multiple rounds of chemotherapy. Though the cancer was gone, Christine's fight was far from over. Chemotherapy had turned her healthy 5'9" body into a skeleton frame. She lost 25 pounds during the treatments, and though she didn't lose her hair completely, her long wavy locks had thinned considerably. Worst of all, she lost the energy and passion for life and for music that had always defined her.

Christine struggled with depression for the next year. Prior to her cancer diagnosis, Christine was working toward a Ph.D in psychology with hopes of becoming a therapist, when she dropped out of

school to pursue music full-time. Ironically, it was the skills she had learned to help others that ultimately saved her. For Christine, understanding the strong connection between mind and body moved her to ask for help. She reached out to friends and family, attended cancer support groups, and even sought the help of a therapist. "I knew I had to find the strength within myself that I had always wanted to help others find within themselves."

Eleven years later and cancer-free, Christine says, "There is life after cancer." She now combines her music with a message to educate others about the tools to prevent cervical cancer: the HPV vaccine for males and females ages nine-26; the Pap test for women starting at age 21; and the HPV test for women 30 and older.

It's not just about the HPV vaccine and test, she says. It's about getting all men and women worldwide access to preventative tools. "We can do it!" says Christine. "What happened to me doesn't have to happen to other women... Cervical cancer is preventable."

For more information on upcoming tours and events visit: theyellowumbrella.org.

CHRISTIE CARMELLE LOPEZ
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↓ **MUST READ!**

Are you in an unhealthy relationship?

We'd like to think abuse is easy to recognize, and sometimes it is. Statistics on physical and sexual assault show that abuse is often clear and far too common:

- One in six women and one in 33 men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.
- Nearly one in four women in the U.S. reports experiencing violence by a partner at some point in her life.

But being in an unhealthy relationship isn't just about being hit or hurt. Sometimes abuse is emotional, saying hurtful things or making someone feel worthless. It can also include excessive jealousy or controlling behavior.

Learning to recognize these signs of abuse is essential, as is understanding that abuse can affect anyone—men and women, young and old, gay and straight.

If you are or have been in a relationship where you were mistreated, it's easy to blame yourself. "Don't! The problem is with the abuser, not you. Help is available so make sure you ask for it," says ASHA Board member Brad Stoner, MD, Ph.D. "Everyone deserves healthy, happy relationships."

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INSIGHT



SEXUALLY ACTIVE? DON'T MISS!

The balance between STD prevention, rewarding sex and sexual health

■ In the broadened arena of sexual health, preventing sexually transmitted disease remains a major priority. The main STD risk is from unprotected intercourse, i.e. penile-vaginal or penile-anal sex, or between female partners by sharing vaginal fluids. Oral sex is lower risk than vaginal or anal intercourse for most STDs and nearly zero risk for some, including HIV. Kissing and hand-genital contact, like mutual masturbation or fingering, rarely transmit STDs even when genital secretions or saliva are used for lubrication. Condoms for vaginal or anal sex are highly protective against all STDs, although they work better to prevent those transmitted through body fluids (chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, nongonococcal urethritis, HIV, hepatitis B), than the ones passed skin-to-skin (human papillomavirus, herpes, syphilis). With modern lubricated condoms, breakage is rare—and microscopic defects that allow STD transmission through

latex or polyurethane are an urban myth.

STD protection should be on the mind of all sexually active people, but shouldn't prevent new relationships and romance. With common sense in choosing partners, creative sexual techniques, condoms for intercourse with non-monogamous partners, periodic testing for common STDs, and prompt medical attention for symptoms like penile or vaginal discharge and genital bumps or sores, everyone can find a balance between STD prevention and rewarding sex and sexual health.

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Dr. Laura Berman

Sex educator, researcher and therapist Dr. Laura Berman has helped countless couples build stronger relationships, improve their sex lives, and achieve a heightened level of intimacy.

PROFESSIONAL INSIGHT



Your sex questions answered

■ What if my partner doesn't seem to want sex as much I do?

There are many issues that can make it difficult to get in the mood and feel desirable, like hormones, stress and body image issues. While you might feel rejected when your partner isn't always sexually available, keep in mind that these issues might be at play and that his/her low desire isn't your fault or a condemnation of your sexual attractiveness. Be loving, supportive, and open, and commit to romance and intimacy.

■ It seems to take longer for me to get turned on now. Is there anything I can do to change or increase my sex drive?

When your sexual response is diminishing due to aging (diminished blood flow to the genitals, changes in hormones, etc.), it can be harder to get aroused and orgasms will become less intense and more difficult to come by. Talk to your doctor to discover what

might be behind your low libido and get your hormones tested. Get more hands-on about your sexual pleasure. Consider sex aids like vibrators or lubricants and spend more time on foreplay and/or self-stimulation.

■ What are the most common sexual dysfunction complaints among aging adults?

Aging impacts our sexual response and can lead to common sexual function complaints such as erectile dysfunction, dryness, difficulty reaching orgasm, or lack of sexual desire. With the help of a good doctor and lots of open communication, you can be sexual forever.

■ I am ready to have brand new sex with my old partner.

What are some of your best romance and intimacy tips?

Good for you! It is important to keep things spiced up in a long-term relationship. Adding spice can be as simple as trying a new position or having sex in a different room in the house. You can also try sex aids

like external or internal stimulators, clitoral vibrators or G-spot stimulators. You can also spice it up in an emotional sense. Send sexy text messages, wear vibrating panties to that boring Christmas party, or check out the local love boutique for some fun warming/tingling lubricants or flavored condoms.

■ As a wife, career woman and mother of three boys, what are your secrets to keeping an active, healthy sex life?

My husband and I work hard at our relationship and make each other our first priority. If we aren't strong together, nothing else in our life works well. We work hard on keeping the communication open, going on regular dates, and taking brief one to two day vacations from the kids a couple times a year to reconnect as partners.

DR. LAURA BERMAN
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Tell your history—even if they don't ask

■ **Question:** What should we do when health care providers don't ask nosy questions?

■ **Answer:** Tell them anyway.

Studies have shown that patients are more likely to believe their health care provider is going to take good care of them if the provider took a detailed sexual history. Unfortunately, most don't. "Doctors are well-trained to do this in their first two years

of medical school," explains Edward Hook, MD, director of the division of infectious diseases at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "But when they get to the clinical years they quickly unlearn this skill." Talking about sex is difficult for most people, providers and patients alike. It is nonetheless crucial that your provider know about your sexual behaviors.

If your provider doesn't bring

up your sexual behavior, bring it up yourself. This may not be as hard as it sounds. Simply saying, "Do you want to ask me about my sexual behavior now?" is enough to let your provider know that you are ready to talk. Providers who do not ask about your sex life are not being polite, they are being incompetent.

Language barrier

It can be even harder to get this right

with young people. "Our perception that young people are uncomfortable talking about sex is actually a reflection of our discomfort," says Dennis Fortenberry, MD, professor of pediatrics at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. However, teens often define sex differently than do adults. "Many young people do not consider oral-genital sex 'standard sex,'" explains Fortenberry, "and many don't consider it sex if one of the partners

was coerced." These language barriers make it even more important that the conversation is open and wide-ranging.

No matter what your age, or sexual habits, taking care of your health requires candor with your provider about it. If the health care provider doesn't introduce the topic, do it yourself.

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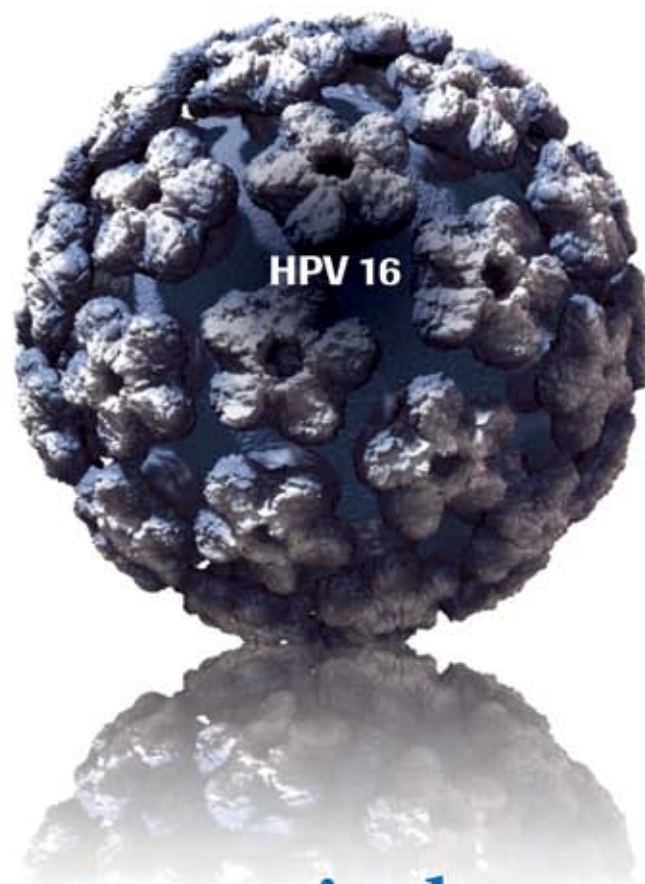
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