

-- Speaker 0 00:00 Hi, you're listening to the closeness podcast. My name is Tari. I'm your host and this is the episode on the big talk. Today we're talking about everyone's least favorite subject, sexually transmitted diseases and sexually transmitted infections. Before we get started, a couple of necessary disclaimers. I'm not a doctor or a clinician. I'm not here to diagnose any disease, adjust medication or offer or sell medication or tell you what you should or should not do with your body and your partners. I'm simply here to inform you about how to communicate about it in a healthy way that will serve both people or all people involved. I'm also not here to make any type of assessment about your health or tell you what you should or should not be doing when it comes to testing and I'm not here to tell you how you should be having sex or what kind of sex you should be having.

Speaker 0 00:47 Now, that being said, I want to talk about how we actually talk about these things. How do you bring them up? How we share news? If you've got some bad news to share, how do you let someone know that you're carrying something and how do you hear it in return? How can you receive news and be respectful to yourself without making the other person feel horrible for what they just told you or worse than they already do about themselves? How do you ask the big questions and when is the appropriate time? Do you have anything I should know about and how do you know that it's true? Do I need to share anything with you? How many of us are sharing this kind of information before you engage in any kind of sexual intimacy but whatever you want to call these buggers, STDs, T herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, non gonococcal, urethritis, human papilloma virus, genital warts and so on.

Speaker 0 01:37 Pose a real threat to all of the fun that we love having with our partners and within our intimate relationships. There seems to be a very large misconception when people tell each other that they are clean. I constantly talk about what loaded words are and clean is another one. What does being clean mean? Does that mean you use soap? Does it mean you get tested annually? Annaly does it mean you get tested several times a year with each new partner? Do you trust the doctor who you go to? Have you ever had a false positive and more specifically, what are you testing for? If you're not regularly testing for everything, in my opinion, you do not know that you're clean and it gets a little tricky because for some things such as herpes simplex one and two, at the time of this recording, you can do a blood test and that'll tell you if the antibody is present.

Speaker 0 02:26 If you've been exposed to herpes winter too, but there aren't any actual tests for herpes unless you're having an actual outbreak. A doctor looking at it can see it with her own eyes and diagnose it right there on the spot. But the tricky thing for instance with herpes is you don't know any more whether it's one or two unless you do the blood test because one can appear down below and two can appear up above. Now, as you can see by this brief discussion of one type of disease, which you can't exactly test for if you don't have symptoms, and many people are asymptomatic for their entire lives, but occasionally pass it on. It's very tricky to know what's going on with you. So the first order of business is you shouldn't run around telling people that you're clean. If you're afraid of needles, you haven't done a full panel before.

Speaker 0 03:12 It's been years since you've seen your gynecologist. You don't know where to go. You don't see someone regularly to get tested and especially don't run around telling people that you're perfectly clean simply because you've never experienced any symptoms and you don't believe you've ever had an outbreak. If you can imagine there are even doctor's offices who won't tell you all the things they're testing for. They'll just pull some blood or take some urine and run a few tests because you're asymptomatic or because you haven't had any symptoms. So some places will think why test for what's not there, or they'll assume you won't want to pay for it. So it's a lot to consider. If you're single and you're sleeping with different people regularly. It doesn't have to mean a lot, whatever a lot means. It's my strong recommendation that you go get yourself tested regularly.

Speaker 0 03:55 It takes about --

-- anywhere between two to three weeks for you to start becoming symptomatic or for a virus or bacteria infection to take hold. It can happen in as little as a few days, but typically you're looking at a couple of weeks. I think it's extremely important for you to educate yourself on what STDs and STDs are, how you can track them, what specifically you can do to avoid them and specifically what behaviors result in the possibility of contracting something. Most of us do not like to talk about these things. Most of us find the idea of looking at something or catching something to be totally disgusting and so often the clinical names for them are absolutely appalling. It's a conversation that everyone should have. Just like when you ask someone if they get along well with their mother. If you're planning on having sex with someone, you should know the risks involved and of course condoms are not the end all be all solution to everything. Speaker 0 04:48 They help a lot, but they have their own set of issues as well, especially if they break. They're old. They have holes. There's an issue with latex. You don't like lube. Anyhow, to me, if a girl told me she was clean, that would mean she presented me with a clean bill of health and she showed me some online test results or a printout that was dated from a professional medical doctor with several series of results. I think some people think that being clean means they don't have HIV or they don't have something incurable or they don't have one or two of the big ones of all the potential diseases available. But if you really want to say to someone, yes, I'm clean, I'm 100% sure I don't have anything, you would want to share with them. A list of results. There are some things that once you've been exposed to them, they are with you for your entire life such as herpes, and you may or may not have ever had an outbreak from them, but again, some people could be symptomatic and some are asymptomatic and from there it's up to you to decide if you do or do not want to have sex.

Speaker 0 05:47 Now, I've come across many people who have been in longterm relationships with people who carry the herpes virus and amazingly the partner who doesn't have it has managed to go a lifetime or the lifetime of the relationship without contracting a disease. How they handle that is that when the partner who has it feels an outbreak coming on because inevitably the reports are that you feel it happening first before anything is visible on your skin, usually by a tingling sensation or a painful sensation. Then they stop having sex or they stop kissing for the week or two that the virus presents itself. It's not a hundred percent foolproof solution, but for many people I've noticed it's worked. I'm not advocating this as a way or guaranteeing that that's not going to get you in trouble in some way. But I do think it's great to know that it is possible and can work.

Speaker 0 06:36 For some couples. Science would have us believe that disease is rampant and for whatever reason in our culture, we just assume everybody has a disease and that if you have sex with someone unprotected, you have to run out and get tested because they probably gave you something. And that I find a little concerning to carry that amount of fear and concern around with us. But you'll hear the reports, one in four people have herpes and that's what they were saying 30 years ago. So it wouldn't surprise me at all if that number had doubled. Even today, of course, bacteria, viruses, they're everywhere, but it also isn't the case that you just touch someone and poof, you've got this life threatening disease. So I think it's important to get yourself tested at least annually. I would even say twice a year, especially if you're having sex with more than one person or you're single or you're dating or you had that one night where you did this thing and you probably shouldn't or you drank too much and you know how that goes and even if you're married and in a committed monogamous relationship, still wouldn't hurt to do it once every year when you have your other blood work done in exams.

Speaker 0 07:43 I would even say for those who are single and dating, every time you have an experience that you're a little unsure of if you can afford it or if your insurance will pay for it or if you have a way to get free testing done, it's smart to do it, but how do we talk about this very difficult, very sensitive --

-- subject in a way that supports both or all parties involved. This is something that's far more difficult to speak about. Then politics, the religion, whether you want to have children or not, and your opinions on whether children should be vaccinated. This one subject is the easiest to hide behind if the easiest to put your head in the sand about, and of course it's easiest for people to lie to you about how do you talk about something that is so off putting and such a turnoff for people that it's almost an instant trigger simply by bringing it up even if you're clean.

Speaker 0 08:33 And the interesting thing is nobody's immune to this. Everyone runs the risk of contracting something you yourself may not even know that you've contracted it. HPV or the human papilloma virus is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections and it's one that condoms don't always protect against. In fact, it's likely that you could have been a carrier of an under 30 or that you will come in contact with it at some point during your life without having any physical signs. Fortunately with that one, sometimes it just goes away over time, but you can even be asymptomatic for chlamydia, gonorrhea and herpes as well as a very little known STD called trichomoniasis, which is actually caused by a parasite, which I know is super gross. So we have to have strategies and methods to discuss these things so that we don't feel uncomfortable so that we don't lie, so that we don't hide behind them.

Speaker 0 09:21 And so that we can have an open, honest communication about it. It requires sensitivity. Now we all have a degree of disgust, sensitivity. Some of us are more sensitive to it than others towards the things that turn us off, disgust and repulse us or make us sneer in distaste. It exists and there's not a lot we can do about it. So what I'm about to ask is that to the best of your ability, you put your feelings of disgust aside for a moment, and I understand it might feel like that's not really a choice. You can't just drop your disgust sensitivity if something turns you off, but you can become more mature. You can behave a little more like an adult. You can take a deep breath, you can practice talking about these things with your girlfriends first or with someone else before talking to them about a loved one.

Speaker 0 10:09 You can educate yourself. You can use different words if you'd like. There's a way around simply feeling like that's disgusting and therefore you don't want to talk about it, think about it or know about it. So I think it's useful to put your squeamishness, your judgment and your fear just to the side for a little bit. When you're having a real conversation that affects the life and the health of you and your partner, it's a very attractive quality to be able to have a genuine conversation about these things. And I'll tell you what, it's a skill with practice. You can get fluent in asking the right questions, speaking words that serve you and serve the other person and is going to serve you immensely. It's my opinion that if you can't speak clearly about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases, what you might be carrying, understanding how getting tested works and how your body works, then you really shouldn't be sexually active because this is one of those areas where choosing not to know or choosing to be uninformed, have your head in the sand actually puts other people's lives at risk in the plural because if you're sexually active, you're having sex with more than one person, you're effectively creating a tremendous risk for everyone around you simply by choosing to not know and not get tested.

Speaker 0 11:28 Especially for men listening to this, it's extremely important for you to know just the nature of being a man and having a thicker skin on our penis because it's on the outside makes us less susceptible to contracting something where as a woman simply by being a woman, simply the nature of her anatomy. By having such a thin membrane inside her vagina, it leaves her much more vulnerable to contracting disease, so get yourself tested.

Speaker 0 11:56 What about when you hear some news that you were not expecting to hear? My supposition is when someone confesses as they should honestly and from a place of vulnerability, that they are a carrier of something, that they have some sort of disease or infection that they didn't ask for, didn't want, don't deserve, but s --

-- somehow someone gave it to them. Many people's first impulse is to be extremely judgmental, disgusted, turned off, repulsed, want to run away, not want to be with them or at least bring the interaction to a halt and maybe bringing the interaction to a halt is what's necessary, but it doesn't take away from the mandatory obligatory, necessary step of kindness and empathy when you're talking to someone else. You don't know if they contracted this disease because someone raped them. You don't know if they contracted this disease because of they were molested as a child.

Speaker 0 12:51 You don't know if they contracted it because they are with a partner man or woman who just decided to not speak their truth and not tell them. Or if they were with a partner who even had no idea themselves and silently passed it on to them, you don't know if they got it because they were in a committed monogamous relationship, someone cheated and then they were stuck with something for the rest of their lives. You don't know the story, but one thing is certain no one went out to look for and try to contract this disease. Of course it was by accident. Of course it wasn't intentional and then of course it could be as a result of stupid behavior. If you're sharing needles and you're constantly having sex without condoms and you share yourself often with perfect strangers and there's a lot of alcohol involved or drugs involved and you just really don't have a lot of self love or self respect or self care, well certainly you're putting yourself into a much higher risk category so you don't have any idea if someone got this because of poor judgment or stupid behavior or foolish behavior on their part or we're just having fun like everybody else has at some point in their life.

Speaker 0 13:56 Or if it came about in an even worse way through a channel that is no fault of their own. Did they drink out of the same soda can, did they contract something because their parents had it so they got it as a child and then there are people who contracted some sort of disease or infection because they trusted someone else or they were taken advantage of by someone else and you don't know this. You don't know that story and because of that, that's why there's a moral obligation to be kind to be understanding, to be as sweet as you can because when you meet a new partner, unfortunately all we hear is they've got this or they've got that or I'm clean or I don't have anything. You don't really get the whole story unless they're really willing to open up vulnerably to you and they might not even know how they got this.

Speaker 0 14:42 Now you in hearing such news have absolutely every right to never have sex with that person again, be with them, be close with them. You have no obligation to do anything in terms of you putting yourself at risk. When someone lets you know they have something you can say, this isn't for me. You can say thank you. I really just don't want to put myself at risk. You can say, I can't do this, but what I believe that you can't do is to be mean cold, rude, distant, judgemental, harsh, vanish without a trace. Never speak to the person again. Act differently towards them, spread rumors and on and on and on. It goes. How and when do you talk about these things? On the one hand, if you both know that you're really interested in one another, I don't think there's ever a time when it's too early and yet at the same time, if you're trying to figure things out and you don't have much invested into your partner, you don't know anything about them, you're just having coffee, then I think it becomes a lot to ask a very big ask for someone to reveal such an intimate part of their sexuality to you when you could use it against them, never talked to them again, judge them, freak out, tell someone and so forth.

Speaker 0 15:58 For instance, if you take online dating when getting to know a perfect stranger on the other end of the chat who I don't even know is real and I don't even know who they are or if they are who they say they are, my top five questions are not going to be are you clean or do you have any STDs I should know about or who was the last person you slept with and when was the last time you had sex? Questions like that. It's interesting because sometimes they're very appropriate questions to ask and others it couldn't be farther from the truth. But if you start to talk on the phone, you're FaceTiming, you'r --

-- e making an appointment, you sense that there's sexual chemistry, then I think it's never too early to say any combination of the following such as, Hey, I really take great care of my sexual health and it's really important to me to know my partner's sexual, not history, but health as well for me to be able to invest fully or to move forward or to have sex with you.

Speaker 0 16:48 So I'd love to chat with you about if we're authentically clean or not, what the other person has or doesn't have and I love for it to be really easy, nonjudgmental, clear conversation and that doesn't have to set an expectation either. You can just get your information out on the table and share it with one another if you feel like it's someone who you feel safe with and comfortable with. Now the tricky part in saying that, it's never too early to talk about it. The caveat is it's never too early to talk about it. If you have something and you feel comfortable and vulnerable enough sharing with the other person because you think there's a very good chance that the both of you are going to have sex. And likewise, if you're a super clean and orderly and organized person with a strong disgust sensitivity, you might feel that you need to get these answered right away.

Speaker 0 17:36 And yet you may not even have come to the decision of whether you're going to have sex with them or not. It can be tricky because it's a little presumptuous to ask someone about that sort of thing if they haven't decided that they're going to have sex with you yet. And at the same time, it's also something that leaves people vulnerable and exposed. So if you ask someone that question and you wind up not having sex with them and they have something now you know something very personal about them. And if you're in a small community of people or you're a gossip or you talk, they run the risk of having their news exposed and no one wants to be that exposed. So for this and many reasons, having an STD that's incurable is also very difficult because you don't want to go blabbing and about to the entire world.

Speaker 0 18:17 It's no one's business, it's very private thing. Plus everyone judges it, including people who probably have it or have something else. So finding the perfect moment to speak about this is really important and you can see that there are a lot of factors involved that influence how and when you might share this news with someone, but I maintain right before you put it in is not necessarily the best time to have that conversation. You might be the kind of person who takes another approach where, well, if they have something, then it's over for you. Or if they don't have something, then it's over for you because you do and you don't want to put someone else at risk to contract it. And so all of these things can be discussed without having to reveal everything right off the bat. You could talk about what's important when it comes to sexual health and sexual activities.

Speaker 0 19:05 Is it really important for you to use condoms all the time without fail and do you like that sort of thing? Do you use condoms all the time and without fail or how does it work when you don't? Are you someone who can't feel anything if you use a condom? Are you someone who has lots of casual encounters when you're drunk and you don't remember if you used a condom, what size condoms do you use? And ladies, listen. Yes, it's true. And you know this too because of how it feels on the inside that wearing a condom significantly and massively decreases sensation compared to not using one. And I think you probably know that as well, that it doesn't feel as close or as connected and what all the sexual education taught us as a kid as like, Oh, it's just the same thing. It doesn't feel any different.

Speaker 0 19:45 And you can grab a piece of saran wrap or a dental dam and just have magnificent oral sex this way, but we all know that that's not really the case. However, the big, but this is absolutely necessary to understand. This does not mean that you need to take on the responsibility or the risk or the pressure or the obligation to have sex with another man without a condom simply because he doesn't feel it as much. There's absolutely no need for you to do that and it's really important that you don't feel talked into it or worked into it or you're super understanding and he's very persuasive, that you always have the right to say no, --

-- but in doing so, have a little sensitivity. I'll say it now and I'll say it again. Many people believe that they are damaged goods, unworthy, no longer suitable for being someone's partner who doesn't have a disease.

Speaker 0 20:38 These things are no small matter. This is not something you can just discard or blow aside and just because you think you don't have something now does it mean you don't have another body condition or way of looking or feel imperfect in some other way that you're not very conscious of yourself and so it's really, really important to understand. This is a really big subject for people. There's a friend of mine who recommended I create this episode and I so appreciated the fact that he shared with me, he's been having a show me your cards. I'll show you mine conversation with the woman or the women who he might be interested in becoming intimate with and before it goes there, they have this conversation, which I think is great, an open conversation discussing it honestly with empathy, which is what I believe my friend has.

Speaker 0 21:20 I don't think you could get better than that. It's the perfect way to create a safe space before getting intimate. I've noticed throughout the years if I don't bring it up so many times, no one else does, or as we mentioned earlier, it's just quickly referenced that yes, they're very clean. Do you want to be having this conversation when you're really turned on and you're really excited and you're gearing to go and you're right about to have sex or you're starting to settle in and get comfortable with each other, do you want to kill the chemistry in the moment in the action that's leading up to it by having that talk right before? No. I would say ideally before things start to get too hot, too intimate and too dangerous where you know your other brain is going to start thinking. It's worth saying here that both women and men have the other brain that gets all caught up way too carried away and way too turned on and makes choices that, I don't want to say you shouldn't have made all the time, but choices that you might've considered differently if you were in a more rational state of mind, and this is even more so true if there's drugs, alcohol, or just pure hot, unadulterated passion, heat, excitement, horniness being turned on makes everyone want to say, screw it all, let's just do it and we want to be free in our sexual exploration.

Speaker 0 22:39 And so that's why I think it's really important to be clear well before things start heating up. And that could be earlier on in the date or it could be earlier on in the conversation when you're texting and talking on the phone. But I do think it's a conversation that's best had in person face to face or at the very least on video chat. So if there's one thing I want you to take away from this section, it is how potent arousal can be when you're really, really turned on, when someone really has you going, it's not even about breaking a moment as much as the passion can override the way you think. And it actually doesn't matter how you identify when someone's really, really aroused, you can do almost anything. All right, so let's move into some dangerous territory about what to look out for, things not to do and all around crappy behavior.

Speaker 0 23:30 Let's look at liars and exaggerators first. There's not a lot you can do about people lying to you and that's why you have to take your safety into your own hands. There's no way to know. If someone says I'm clean. They could even falsify a document and change the date on it technically, if wanted to. As an Acrobat, we work all the time with a partner and we have to trust that partner, but many times we come into contact with people who we've never met before. We've never touched before. We know nothing about, very similar to how it goes when you meet someone for the first time on a first date and if that person says, yeah, listen, I got you, I got you. No matter what, I'll catch you. You're not going to get hurt. You want to believe them. You want to trust them, but you don't know for sure.

Speaker 0 24:13 You have to sniff around a little bit. You have to watch them, observe them, see how they talk and interact with others and if they've worked for other people before. Are there any references when you inspect the merchandise, does anything stand out to you? Verify the trust, verify the stability, make sure that they' --

-- re a good fit for you. I want to believe just as much as you do that the people who we attract into our lives as potential mates, potential sexual partners are inherently good and that they want to be honest. I think generally when people are hiding something, it's because they are embarrassed about it or humiliated by it or don't want to experience shame around it. If you're someone who's on the extreme side of concern and you have a partner who you're really interested in and you guys have been intimate, you're kissing a little bit, you're touching, you're connecting, you know that this is something you want to pursue.

Speaker 0 25:05 Certainly you can go get tested together. That's like the end all be all way to make sure you know what's going on. You're in the room with each other the whole time and you can see everything go down with your own eyes. I personally haven't gotten that extreme before where I take someone in with me and we both get tested together, but I have come across some very special people who wanted both of us to go get tested before having sex, which I thought was very nice. I feel like that's them looking out for themselves, them looking out for me and I was happy to do it and even though I wouldn't call the process itself of getting it done fun, it is extra special to be able to say, I went and I did this for you and now I'm going to put myself inside of you and it's going to be amazing and hot and we're not going to have anything to worry about.

Speaker 0 25:51 Interestingly, one of the times that I did get this request, she didn't want to be presumptuous about it before we both knew that's what we wanted to do. Even though we had actually known each other for a long time, we hadn't known each other in this context and so we had to do some feeling out, some exploring some date time before we knew that we wanted to get there. So naturally as part of this exploration process, we went through some of the preliminaries of heavily making out and eye contact and talking to one another about it and touching and kissing and licking and tasting, wanting to explore more, wanting to do more, but her boundary was and always has been for other men prior to me and me, not until both of us went to get tested. Guess what? Did it kill and destroy and ruin the moment?

Speaker 0 26:41 No. Did we have sex? No, but that doesn't mean you can't do all number of other things to build anticipation. Get excited, spend time, connect, get to know the other person's body, especially if you're out in nature and underneath the stars, so that when the time finally comes and you get to play with all the goodies, seeing those results can go miles to helping you both enjoy yourselves more and have a really good time without reason for concern. Now, if you're someone who likes to feel into things a little bit more or you really like to trust people, you feel like the people you attract into your life are the ones who are trustworthy and you feel like people are going to be honest with you. You can have a real conversation about it and do your best to feel into whether someone's being honest with you or not.

Speaker 0 27:24 There's a big difference between saying you're clean and then saying that you've never had an outbreak of anything before. Very big difference. One means you've been tested, you know for sure the other means you are relying on pure speculation, taking a wild guess, a shot in the dark and all that it means is that you're asymptomatic. All right, let's get into some bad scheming triflin behavior. Men in case this wasn't abundantly clear. Even if you have consent to have sex flat out, you do not have a right to just push yourself inside of another woman if she has requested that you put a condom on. Now this is very slippery territory because there's always a little banter. Some people have different sensitivities and others, some people are comfortable with rubbing on each other for a little bit. Some people are comfortable with almost doing it, almost sliding in.

Speaker 0 28:17 But then right before you do using a condom and some people want no genital contact whatsoever. But if something is spoken, which by the way is to me the only sure fire way to make sure you are understood by saying, Hey, get a condom or I'm going to put this condom on before I have sex with you. Or give me one second to get the condom. Or do you have any condoms? Any requests like this should n --

-- ever, ever, ever be met with. I think I'll just put my Dick inside. Can you imagine if you told someone to warn you before they put something in your mouth and uh, your girlfriend just stuffed something in there that you didn't like it all? I think that comes from a very rude, inconsiderate, cold place of someone who just doesn't care. They don't care what they have. They don't care if they give you anything.

Speaker 0 29:03 They don't care what you have. They just want to dominate. And conquer and I find that very unattractive in today's day and age where people have sex instantly. It's hard to have a conversation about using condoms and STDs when you don't even know if you're going to have sex with them, but sometimes you wind up having sex with them anyway. It's really difficult to know when the right time to have the talk is and personally, I don't find the best time to be right before having sex to have a discussion. I think it's good to have some clarity. Let it marinate a little bit in your mind. Think about the choices you're about to make and then allow a moment to unfold. I am all for using your mouth before you have sex and talking about what do you like, where is your boundary? How do we feel about these things?

Speaker 0 29:48 Do you have a condom? Are we going to go to your place? Do you want to have a quick talk about getting tested? Are you okay if I touch you down here? Are you okay if my cock touches you down here? Where are we on this? In my coaching and personal experience, it's been my understanding that women are often a little too compliant with whatever the man wants to do, where they can actually establish a boundary and say, Hey, no, I don't want to do this without a condom. Or do you have anything? Or pulling out of their purse themselves or reach over to the nightstand and grab one and say, here, put this on. I don't know what the true motivating factor is as to why more women don't speak up about if they want to use protection. Of course, if you don't, you don't.

Speaker 0 30:32 And of course everybody knows it feels better without et cetera, et cetera. But I don't know if it's a question of being in a vulnerable position or not wanting to ruin a moment or hoping that the guy you're with doesn't get upset. But I think it's always okay to ask without fail, no matter what, if it's something that's important to you. So how and where can you get tested? Well, it's wonderful in today's world that it has never been easier to do so. But depending on where you go, we can get very pricey. So for the most part your insurance should cover it once to twice a year free of charge, all included when you do your blood work. But sometimes you have to request the specific tests and sometimes they can wind up costing extra. And even worse sometimes with insurance companies, as many doctors love to say, we have no idea how much it costs.

Speaker 0 31:20 We have no idea what they're going to bill you. We have no idea if they're going to cover it or not. You just have to wait and see. And it's this very bizarre thing of having some blood work and testing done, not knowing how much it's going to cost you, paying for the lab work, the doctor's time and so forth, and then just praying that it might be covered. I'm not a fan of this option and there are other ways and further to that you should know exactly what you want to get tested for because everyone's definition of everything is not the same. There's like a big 10 list you can go by, but simply doing one or two tests, which is what is routine like chlamydia, gonorrhea, the typical bacteria infections. Often they don't test for things that you don't have symptoms for. Now if you're on something like medical Medicare or you can't afford to go in and get testing or you don't have insurance, there are free clinics such as Planned Parenthood.

Speaker 0 32:09 They're also really great about not leaving messages saying hi, it's Planned Parenthood. They'll say hi, it's a doctor's office calling, which is great and ask for a call back. They're very confidential and very private and that could be another good route to go down as well. Planned Parenthood has notoriously done free and paid STD testing for decades and they test for almost everything. And what's great is I do a lot of stuff right there on the spot. You know, if you have HIV or not in 15 minutes or less, syphilis and herpes or blood tests, so they'll be sending those --

-- out. Chlamydia and gonorrhea. I believe her urine, that also gets sent out. And then there are some things that you just can't test for or you just can't test for in men where people will always be a symptomatic and you won't know for sure.

Speaker 0 32:51 Then finally, I would be remiss not to tell you about some of these great online websites that offer STD testing such as STD check.com I'm in no way affiliated with them, but I know they do a great package of 10 tests, which individually are almost \$150 sometimes for one test in some cases, but they do a package of 10 for \$200 which is pricey, but it is instant. It's confidential. The test for hepatitis a, B, C, HIV one and two, syphilis, herpes, one, herpes, two chlamydia and gonorrhea, and what's incredible about this is once you pay online the \$200 fee, you anonymously can print out your paperwork, go to almost any lab that they're connected with, which inevitably will be a couple miles away from your house. You walk in, you hand in the paperwork, they draw your blood, your urine, send it off, and in a couple of days you have results and you just can't get better than that.

Speaker 0 33:46 How can we feel better about all this stuff? Disease, infection, bacteria, getting sick. All of this is very much a way of life for almost all of us. We've all been sick. We've all had a fever. If you're a woman, you know it's highly likely that you've already had a urinary tract infection or for some women, even BV, bacteria vaginosis, maybe some of us have had strep throat or chicken pox or shingles or all number of other maladies and somehow, somehow none of them discussed us. None of them gross us out. None of them freak us out in the way they do when it comes to things that are sexually transmitted, but it's for obvious reasons. It's in our most precious and sensitive place. It's one of our most prized and protected areas and for the love of God, the names don't help either. Herpes, what an absolutely disgusting and repugnant name, herpes zoster virus.

Speaker 0 34:40 Could they have been any more distasteful and picking and classifying this name, it's completely repulsive and unacceptable and very much not elegant. Other diseases have cute names. Paris syndrome, cat scratch, fever, Alison Wonderland syndrome. Think about how much more palatable it would be, how much more accepting you would be if you were simply saying, Oh, you know, you've got the flowers virus, or at the moment you're experiencing lovers remorse or heat of the moment, virus, anything to take the edge off. It sounds so much better than herpes. Even the medication for herpes has a much better name than herpes does itself. Vowel tracks. Imagine if you simply had Val tracks. Just sounds like some sort of futuristic music as someone who very much cares about the way things sound and roll off the tongue. Herpes sits rather high on my a shit list, so I think the name alone very much contributes to people not wanting to talk about it as well as what most people would consider to be a very unsightly presentation on their own body.

Speaker 0 35:38 But being an ostrich with your head in the sand and not being educated about what the potential risks are and what's really going on is silly. Frankly. I mean, we live in a world where people are either on drugs or drunk every night of the week. Drinking is a social activity. Most people have way more than they should on a regular basis. Countless people smoke an enormous amount of weed multiple times a day. Most people do way more drugs probably than they need to be doing. And then of course some people are on prescription meds, which makes them a little loopy. Then we've got pain relievers, prescription meds, et cetera. So in today's day and age, it can actually be pretty rare to find someone of sound conscious mind when you're about to have a really important conversation. And then you don't even know if they're going to lie to you, be honest with you or show you their card.

Speaker 0 36:23 So I find all in all the best thing you can do is get your testing done regularly and have your results handy. Take a screenshot of it or make a little collage and make sure your name and the date is showing and nonreactive and put people at ease. If you do have something that you need to share, know that it really is going to be okay and there will be people out there who will still have sex with you, still be with you and still date you. --

-- You're not damaged goods. There's nothing wrong with you as a person and I think you'll find that many people are less worried about some things than they are others. For instance, some people only care about life threatening diseases and they don't care about chlamydia, gonorrhea, I mean they do and they'll get it handled, but it doesn't strike them as such a terrifying thing because they understand that like anything else, it's a bacteria infection that you can get rid of.

Speaker 0 37:12 The interesting thing about the bacteria viruses is often they are a simple one dose solution. You just dissolve some powder into a cup, take it, don't have sex for two weeks and it's done. It's not a big scary thing like some people make it out to be herpes. On the other hand you have to really decide do you want to be on Val tracks or take medication to constantly suppress cold sores? Do you want to be on an antiviral medication? Do you want to change your diet and lifestyle to help the complications such as not eating nuts and other things that contribute to breakouts. It's a lot to consider and the purpose of this podcast is not to guide you through treatment or tell you what you should be taking orally, but more about how you have the conversation about these things and I keep coming back to the way in which you address it with your partner, the quality of your tone, your consciousness and presence, your sweetness and your courtesy and respect towards one another because you don't know what your partner knows about themselves and they don't know that about you.

Speaker 0 38:12 And I think it can be a really nice idea to start the conversation off by saying this is a sensitive subject. It doesn't matter what I have it as a matter of what you have. Neither of us are in a position to judge because we don't know how it happened or why it happened. Even if you have nothing to hide. To have that conversation and put the other person at ease, I think is just an incredible thing to do. If it turns out that you discover that you have something after you've been with someone and you've disclosed to the best of your ability and theoretically they've disclosed to you, but for some unfortunate reason, you go visit a doctor and you get diagnosed with something, it is 100% your duty and obligation to reach out. Call all of your previous partners since you've been tested and possibly even beyond, depending on what your doctor tells you and let them know they should go get tested.

Speaker 0 39:01 You could do it anonymously, which I also frankly think is pretty messed up. You can be direct about it. I personally think a phone call would be nice. You don't have control about how people are going to respond to you and if they're going to freak out, vanish, get upset, get angry, be hurt, not talk to you ever again or be really understanding and cool and have a nice conversation with you. But what is in your control is the ability to keep people safe, healthy and alive. Because a lot of these STDs, if they go untreated can cause very, very serious health complications. So while it may suit you to just keep quiet, the are too embarrassed you think is disgusting, you're too shy or humiliated. Maybe you cheated on someone and you want to keep this to yourself just to make yourself look good.

Speaker 0 39:47 Keep in mind that you are putting someone else's life at risk by not sharing. Of course, some people will still do it through text or vanish or do it anonymously, but I think the best thing you can do is be an adult about it and communicate to someone that they should get tested. Nobody repeat, nobody wants a sexually transmitted disease. However half if not two thirds of people listening to this, they already have one as someone who has literally just got his testing done. The statistics now are that one in three people have the herpes one virus and one in six or seven have herpes too. Not only that, but it's no longer the case that one is up above and two is down below. Now they can sort of cross pollinate. What about the aftermath after you share some poor unfortunate news with your partner or they share it with you?

Speaker 0 40:43 Let's be real. There is a big chance with the degree that people run hide, ghost each other. Freak out for the tiniest little thing. Sharing something like this could have some serious repercussions. You should know, especially with how people act these days, that it is poss --

-- ible for you to never see or never talk to the person again. No matter how close they are to you and you should be prepared for that. I don't want that for you. I hope that doesn't happen. I think that's absolutely appalling and disgusting behavior, but it's something you have to be prepared for. And also that way when they have a much better reaction, like a normal human being should, neither person will feel so bad. Someone could get very angry with you, someone could be disappointed, and what most likely will happen if your sharing news with someone else is they'll freak out, but not so much because you have it because of the risk that they might have contracted it.

Speaker 0 41:37 And so it's important to be able to separate out what that fear in that freak outs about. It's a natural response to freak out about something that you didn't want in your body. You hope to God you don't have, and it puts a very unsettling feeling into people's stomachs. Of course, me taking a closeness perspective, how would I want to handle this or how would I like to have it handled with me? If the person means something to me, I care about them. I have feelings for them. I kind of would want them to be by my side through that while we go get tested, understand what's really going on so that one of us could educate the other on what the risks and repercussions are. If unfortunately you received some news, you have to give news to someone you don't know. This is hard because you don't have an emotional connection to them.

Speaker 0 42:21 Maybe, but maybe you've had sex already, so what do you do? I still think it's hugely important to share the news and then ask, how can I support you through this? Do you need to go? Do you need to not talk for a while? You can be sincere about saying, look, I want to be in touch with you. I like to see you again or talk to you more, but I hope this doesn't change anything for us. I just think no matter what kind of person you are, no matter how blunt or direct or how much of an unpleasant or disagreeable person you are here more than ever is the time to be extra nice, extra sweet and extra sympathetic in both directions. It's going to be hard. If you hear some news for the first time, you're going to be shaken and stirred up and not know what to do.

Speaker 0 43:00 And especially if someone gives that news to you, how can you then be nice to them? And how can you then be friendly or understanding or sympathetic? Well, I hope the thought that helps you is chances are they probably had no idea they had it and they don't know who gave it to them or why they had it or didn't even know or they weren't symptomatic and all number of things could be true. So it's good to mentally prepare yourself for these things and not just blindly hope that they never happen. It's my sincere hope that they never do. I hope you have a lifetime of fun and sexuality without having to address any of this stuff, but knowing what's out there, knowing how to handle it and knowing how to be mature about it can actually save your relationship entirely. Nowhere is this kind of communication more important than if you're in a polyamorous relationship or you're dating several other people.

Speaker 0 43:48 It's critical to have very clear cut boundaries, lines, rules, or understanding that you have with your partner as to what you're going to do, what you're not going to do, what's you're going to partake in? Are you going to be having anal sex? Are you going to be with the same sex? Are you going to be using needles? Are you going to be using condoms? Are you going to be having sex with no condom with your primary partner, but condoms with your tertiary and so on, but not with your secondary? Will you be partaking in all of the above? Will you be going to orgies? You take my point. Something I've noticed through counseling couples who are in polyamorous relationships is this ability to discount or disregard the third person, the one who the relationship, the unicorn, the one who the husband is seeing on the side, or maybe you're the wife's boyfriend or the lover who they go see occasionally when the going gets rough, the third person or the third wheel will have a tendency to be the first one to be shut out and not be shown the same level of respect, care and love that the primary partners are showing one another.

Speaker 0 44:52 They get less time, they don't get deferred to, they don't get th --

-- e most respect and love or the same amount of respect and love that they should be getting. When it comes to talking about these intimate details. If you're in some sort of open relationship and it turns out that someone has a disease, it can cause a really big uproar and again, how you go about communicating that, handling it and the courtesy and respect and care that you show for that person really makes a big difference. And I want to add as a special message to anyone who might be in this position. You have a right to be treated well. You have a right to be treated equally. You have a right to not be shut out or to have people shut you down and even though you don't have the clout that the husband or the wife or the boyfriend the girlfriend has that you're joining in with, that doesn't mean that you don't deserve to know and be treated with respect and also get the help that you need and you can definitely express that to them as a couple and hopefully they'll be receptive.

Speaker 0 45:48 Now, if it turns out you are diagnosed, you have been or you will be at some point in the future, might I offer a few empathetic, caring words? It's not the end of the world. Your life isn't over. You're not damaged goods. It's not true that no one is ever going to want you, desire you or accept you again, it's not true that people who do not have what you have are not ever going to want you, not desire you again. It is a possibility. That's true. It has the potential to be true, but it's not globally true and it's not true for only the people that you like. It really is okay. Chances are your partners may already have something and they don't even know about it. With the exception of one disease, which is HIV, we have things in place to make it either manageable, livable, or to eradicate it altogether.

Speaker 0 46:43 And it seems like it feels more than likely that in this lifetime it seems like we may even have the potential to have cures for such things. Also, another note about that terrible sounding disease. Herpes, most people who have their first initial outbreak, that's when it's the worst. And then some people never have one again for the rest of their lives or it's so minor and minimal that they never even notice it. You don't have to be on medication for the rest of your life. You just have to know how to take care of yourself and there's tons of resources out there to do so. And then a note about the herpes simplex two blood test, which again is a test that only checks for antibodies responding to exposure to the herpes virus. That is only 60 to 80% effective and it is possible to a false positive.

Speaker 0 47:30 This, again coming directly from the doctor's office, but things in the herpes zoster family are very complex. You know, you've got chicken pox, you've got shingles, you've got herpes one and two and theoretically there are several other strains and potentially other strains aren't even diagnosed yet. It's a pretty nasty virus that for the most part, much of the world is already infected with anyway and people live out very happy and healthy lives as such. It's highly unlikely that you'll never date again and you may even find it to be a total relief to disclose what's going on with you. Your partner does the same and maybe even have the same virus, but the truth of the matter is anything like this carries weight, negative energy, pain, and it's always critical to disclose what you know and what's been discovered to your potential partners. If you're dealing with something that's curable, make sure you don't have sex until you finish all the medication and you've also verified that you've waited the exact amount of time for it to work.

Speaker 0 48:28 He'll clear itself from your body. Some people will even want to get tested again. That's actually a very smart thing to do to make sure that it's completely been eradicated from your body and then get involved with sex one skin. Then frankly, it's up to you what you choose to disclose because if nothing is in your body in that moment, then technically you are not infected with anything. So it's semantics. If someone asks you if you've ever had a sexually transmitted disease, the answer would be yes. If someone asks you if you currently have anything and if you've been tested the answer be no, you don't. And you have recently been tested and you're clean and I'm talking about all this stuff very directly and cleanly, but I can --

-- 't underscore enough. I understand how fearful you might be about it, how scary it can be, and frankly, many people are flat out liars and have no problem deceiving you or don't even care what they have or maybe passing on to you every time you have a scare, what that feels like in your stomach or your chest.

Speaker 0 49:21 Every time you think something's wrong with your body and it turns out it's not. What a blessing. I can't tell you how many times over the years I've gotten a pimple and freaked out because it was close to my mouth or close to somewhere below and thought, Oh my God is the sit is the set and it feels so good when you're like, Oh, it's just a pimple, which is not something you usually find yourself saying about pimples. Another disgusting word, by the way, I know there's such a nice relief in that feeling of knowing that everything is okay. Sometimes you could go get tested and find you have a false positive and then it's important to actually test again before running through all these terrible scenarios in your head. You get tested to different places or have your blood work submitted again, I get it.

Speaker 0 50:00 It can be a very nerve wracking and terrifying experience sometimes because of how you shave or wax or laser. You think you have something down below. You think you're having a breakout, but it's just an ingrown hair or you might have your condom break or it can slip off or fall off because your girl is so tight. Sometimes you could feel like you thought you knew someone and then you didn't and then they disclose something to you. And then there's the fact that people just wind up lying to themselves even convincing that they never had sex with someone that they've had sex with for hours or a handful of times. And this is something you have no control over other people's psychology, what they say, what they believe. Some people will tell themselves something till they believe it. So you really have to look out for your own wellbeing.

Speaker 0 50:43 The stories are endless and one thing is true. They all create fear. Fear has a tendency to paralyze you. It makes you not be able to think. It makes you feel like you can't focus on anything. And we were in that state of mind. We are useless, useless to anyone else and useless to ourselves because we are in the grip of fear. So one of the most important things to do when you're in a fear state, and this applies to everything in life, but particularly with this subject, is to do things that soothe you to help you get out of it. You don't want to make serious decisions freak out. When you're at your worst state, it's good to identify are you feeling alone and helpless and you don't know where to turn. And so you need help or do you feel like you don't want anybody to know about this and you want to go figure it out on your own or you have the resources to do so?

Speaker 0 51:32 How do you want to handle it in a way that you find most soothing? Allow yourself to calm down, breathe, go within, meditate a little bit. Just sit for a moment before letting loose. Do whatever it takes to make things a little bit better. Put your focus on something else until you come back into a sound state of mind because there's nothing that being all worked up and freaked out and in a paralyzed state of terror is going to help you achieve. Now while we're on the subject of pain and painful experiences, I also think it's incredibly valuable to be sensitive, empathetic, and understanding. If you're a man or a woman and your girlfriend or wife is having some sort of female pains such as period pain or a yeast infection, a urinary tract infection, a kidney stone or anything else and involves that very sensitive area.

Speaker 0 52:29 If you've never experienced pain down there, you don't know what it's like. It's all encompassing. It's excruciating for people. They can't think or focus on anything else. It constantly pulls your attention there because we have the most sensitivity down there. It's really challenging when you have a really strong connection or attraction with someone. You want to have sex with them. Ravish them, love them up all the time, but you've got to let her rest. You've got to give her time to heal and time for it to go away and that takes a week or two or three or four and you have to be a bigger person because women are often easily persuaded or they don't want to let you down or they want to be accomm --

-- odating or they get super horny, wet and juicy, and you know how easy it is to turn her on.
Speaker 0 53:09 All these factors can contribute to having things last longer than they should because you guys just won't stop having sex. Lastly, I'll leave you with this no matter what the outcome is, whether you have the good fortune of being clean your entire life, the misfortune of having something that's curable or you catch something that's not curable, but it doesn't make you suffer much or a few unfortunately suffer regularly from something here more than ever. The expression is true. This too shall pass. It doesn't occupy every day of your life, all the time, nonstop, 24 seven. It's almost always for most people, a very short period of time where they deal with it and then everything goes back to normal. Once again, chlamydia can be cured, gonorrhea can be cured, syphilis can be cured, genital warts can be cured and yes, even non gonococcal urethritis can be cured with antibiotics.

Speaker 0 54:01 So really what does that mean? This is purely my opinion, but I believe we have three major risks. Number one is having something that goes untreated that you didn't know you had because you're asymptomatic. You can knock that right out of the park by getting tested regularly. Number two, contracting HIV. Fortunately this is extremely rare and there are things you can do to massively reduce your risk. And then we have number three, this nightmare, disgusting sounding herpes virus that no one wants, that most people have. And do you have it above and do you have it below? This is the one to look out for except you can't look out for it unless you can see a visual manifestation of shedding or a sore or an outbreak that's pending or just going away. So if you're someone who wants to be very, very cautious, don't hesitate to thoroughly inspect your partner's mouth and genitals.

Speaker 0 54:54 As odd as that might sound before you give them a blow job, go down on them, eat them out, or explore them in that way and frankly, I've done that a lot in my life. If I know I'm going to have oral sex with a partner, I really want to go down on her. I make sure there's ample lighting in the room as careful and lovingly as I can. I look around while I'm playing with her and teasing her, touching her, fingering her, doing all number of things with my hand or toy or her hand, whatever, but before I put my mouth there, I'm looking and there have been times where I've genuinely asked, Hey, I noticed you have some redness or tenderness going on down here. Is this razor burn or something else I should know about? I just want to check. It's certainly within your right to do so and you don't have to be embarrassed about asking.

Speaker 0 55:36 I would have absolutely no problem if a girl said, excuse me, is that a pimple or something? I should be worried about, ask some questions. There's been countless times where I've asked to grow what happened to your lip and you wouldn't believe some of the things. Some girls have been bitten by dogs on their mouth and lip and it's left a permanent scar there that looks like they're about to have an outbreak. Some girls get pimples, some people cut their lips or their mouth. Some people have chapped lips and it looks like that. It never hurts to ask or find out. So inspect the merchandise. Don't let it be a concern to you, but just don't do it in a clinical way or in an odd way that might break the moment, but certainly you're allowed to look and touch if you're about to engage in something that's consensual.

Speaker 0 56:20 Great. So I hope that in listening to this, you found it be an extremely valuable resource for how to handle your emotional state, how to handle your partner's emotional state, how to be more sensitive and empathetic to what people have going on in their lives, knowing that no one chose to contract a sexually transmitted disease or virus. Nobody wanted that. No one went out to try to get it. And again, I'm not a doctor, a clinician. I'm not here to diagnose any disease or tell you what you should or shouldn't do or what you do and don't have. But when it comes to the communication aspect of this oof more than ever before, I think it's critical to be a very kind person. Take some deep breaths. Be as understanding as possible as you work through it. Remember, you're not alone. Remember, you have plenty of resources.

Speaker 0 57:05 If in dou --

-- bt, go have a real doctor or someone from planned Parenthood or someone from a clinic. Look at what you have going on. Have an exam, have testing done, and treat your partners with the same love and care that you would treat yourself or the way you would treat your son or daughter or the way you would treat someone who you care about deeply. Remember, if you live in the San Diego or greater Los Angeles area and you want to come in for one on one closeness coaching, I invite you to make an appointment online or by calling me directly, please visit the website. Get closeness.com for more information and if you are moved by this episode or any other episode and would like to make a monthly contribution to the podcast, it helps tremendously. Our Patririon is patriion.com forward slash closeness P. a. T. R. E. O. N. all right. I'm wishing all of you very happy and healthy and clean sex lives and I'll catch you in the next episode. Thanks for listening.

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