

It can happen to anyone: First diagnosis of genital herpes



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Genital herpes – a common infection that affects ‘ordinary’ people

Myths and ignorance abound.....

Good information helps make sense of diagnosis



Why do I feel this way?

Common reactions

A diagnosis is often unexpected and you may feel

- Surprise, shock and grief
- Uncertainty
- Anger & blame

or just have some questions.....



What is the herpes simplex virus (HSV)?

- A common viral infection that's been around for centuries
- Most people have no symptoms
- Causes facial herpes (HSV1) passed by kissing
- and genital herpes (HSV1 or HSV2) passed by oral sex (HSV1) or genital-to-genital contact (HSV1 or HSV2)
- A fragile virus that dies when it leaves living human cells – **not** passed on through non-sexual contact e.g. toilets & showers, trying on clothes, medical examinations



When did I contract the virus?

- Often not possible to work out because:
 - Most people contract herpes from a partner who did not know they have HSV
 - Most have very mild, or no symptoms and go undiagnosed - may have genital herpes for months or years before diagnosed, if ever
 - Only small % of people have severe 1st symptoms – may indicate new infection
 - HSV is not routinely tested for in sexual health check-ups



How do people contract genital herpes?

- Through direct skin to skin sexual contact including:
 - Genital to genital and oral to genital
 - Therefore virgins can & do contract genital herpes
 - Condoms reduce transmission (condoms **do** stop many STIs)
 - Partner has to be infected either facially or genitally – sore may not be obvious & the virus may be on the surface of the skin without symptoms on small % of days



Who did I contract the infection from?

- May be impossible to work out how long a person has had the infection & who HSV came from
- If genital HSV1-probably transmitted through oral sex, partner may have or had 'cold sores' on face
- If first symptoms are mild, may have had the infection for months or years
- Significant first symptoms ('flu-like illness, lots of blisters) may mean HSV contracted in past 2-20 days.
- If several recent partners may be impossible to determine who the infection came from
- Genital herpes may appear in a long-term relationship with no outside partners involved



What next? Recurrences and treatment options

- Recommend oral anti-viral medication and pain relief to treat first episode
- Optional oral medication for recurrences
- If unwell take time off work - rest
- Prescription needed for anti-viral medication
- HSV1 – may have few, if any recurrences
- HSV2 – may have 2-6 recurrences per year
- Recurrences usually mild and are over in a few days
- Most people don't use regular medication after 1st episode



What next? Relationships

- Talk to your partner- share information
- Partner may have HSV – once contracted the virus doesn't pass back and forth
- Reduce transmission by avoiding genital contact with partner when symptoms present
- Condoms reduce transmission of HSV
- If partner does contract virus, most likely to have few if any symptoms



What's next? Future plans

- People with genital herpes have normal lives...
 - Have normal fertility
 - Women have healthy babies and vaginal deliveries –
 - Can donate blood
 - Can work in any occupation
 - Can use spa & swimming pools
 - Can cuddle with their kids in bed, share a bath
 - Make choices with their partners about sexual practices and the use of condoms
 - Have the same overall health, immune system and lifespan as others and no additional cancer risk



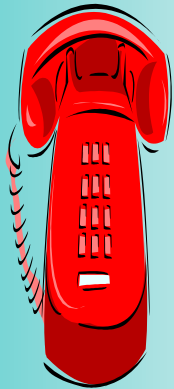
What next? Talking is good

- Tell trusted friend/family member
- Return to your GP, Family Planning Clinic or sexual health clinic for follow-up
- Counselling available at sexual health clinics
- For information, phone counselling & support group contact:
- Phone toll free 0508 11 12 13 or from a mobile 094336526
- www.herpes.org.nz



NZ Herpes Foundation: Helping people to live ordinary lives

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