

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SEX & SEXUAL HEALTH

CARD

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There is a lot of misinformation and myths out there about sex, sexual health and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Maybe you've heard something you are unsure about - such as "can you really get an STI from a toilet seat?"

On these 4 cards you can read which are MYTHS and which are FACTS!

PREGNANCY

M The best way to avoid getting pregnant is to use a condom

F The best way to avoid getting pregnant is through **abstinence**. Abstinence (not having any kind of sex) is the only 100% effective form of birth control. If abstinence isn't an option, using a condom in combination with a contraceptive pill is the next best way to avoid getting pregnant.

M You cannot get pregnant while having your period

F Although very uncommon, it is possible to get pregnant while having a period, since in some people the period does not prevent the release of an egg (which has to be present for sperm to begin the process of conception). Additionally, since sperm can live inside your uterus for up to 5 days, if an egg is released during these 5 days the woman can get pregnant. You can avoid getting pregnant by using a form of contraception - even during menstruation.

M Urinating or douching after sex protects against pregnancy

F When a male ejaculates, the sperm travels through the vagina into the cervix, and then into the uterus. Urine is released from a different opening called the urethra, so it does not come in contact with sperm. When ejaculation (release of sperms) occurs, sperms travel at a great speed into the cervix. Semen /sperms cannot be prevented from entering the uterus since the liquid used in douching only affects the vagina and no further. Douching is not safe since it causes a disruption of healthy bacteria on the vaginal walls, and can lead to an increased risk of contracting a vaginal infection.

M A girl cannot get pregnant the first time she has sex

F It does not matter if it is the first time a girl is having sex, once an egg is available it is possible to get pregnant. A girl can have eggs ready for fertilization even though she never experienced a period.

(continued)

PREGNANCY

Abstaining from sex altogether is the best way to prevent pregnancy, but if one decides to have sex, condoms and other birth control methods can help prevent pregnancy.

M The Pill is always effective immediately after you begin taking it

F The Pill helps to prevent the release of eggs (ovulation) for fertilization. It does so by regulating some hormones. In some women, one complete menstrual cycle is needed for the hormones in the Pill (oral contraceptive) to work with the woman's natural hormones to prevent ovulation while in others this may be longer. Some doctors recommend using a back-up method of birth control (such as condoms) the first month of taking the Pill.

M A woman cannot get pregnant if she has sex standing up, is on top or in the shower

F If you have unprotected sex you can get pregnant, no matter how or where you do it. Some people believe that having sex in certain positions, such as standing up, will force the sperm out of the woman's vagina. In truth, positions during sex have nothing to do with whether or not fertilization occurs. When a man ejaculates, the sperm is deposited well into the vagina and will, by nature, begin to move up through the cervical canal into the uterus immediately after ejaculation.

M If a condom breaks, there's nothing you can do but hope not to get pregnant

F Yes you can do something. If the condom has split during sex, even if it is before your partner has ejaculated, you can seek emergency contraception. The emergency contraceptive pill (morning after pill) must be started within 72 hours after sex to be effective. The pills are available from your doctor or health centre. Emergency contraception is not an option to be considered before sex. It is exactly what is says- a last resort should your main form of contraception fail.

M You can't get pregnant during unprotected sex if the man pulls out before he ejaculates (cums)

F You can. Sperm can still be present in his pre-cum (the clear, sticky drops that are released when he is aroused) even though the man does not ejaculate. Therefore, sperm can be released even while the penis is still in the vagina during sex. Also some men are not aware that they are ejaculating until it's too late, and it's easy to get carried away in the heat of the moment.

SEX & SEXUALITY

CARD

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Sex is not usually a topic of discussion in this part of the world.

It is considered indecent to openly discuss issues and facts related to sex and sexuality and this gives rise to many misconceptions. Here are some of the myths and facts relating to sexuality.

M Most women can have an orgasm through vaginal sex only

F Only about 30% of women reach orgasm through vaginal sex only. The other 70% need more manual or oral stimulation to achieve orgasm.

M Girls don't masturbate

F Girls in fact are curious about their bodies and do masturbate. However on average, boys are more likely to report that they masturbate than girls. Women might be afraid to engage in or admit to masturbating to the same degree as men do.

M Men, "not breaking" when aroused lead to "blue balls"

F "Blue balls" is a real medical condition. The correct medical term for "blue balls" is **vasocongestion**. This happens when blood builds up in the testicles and/or prostate when a male gets aroused (turned on) but does not ejaculate. It is often accompanied by a cramp-like ache and pain or tenderness in the groin area. While this can be uncomfortable, it is **not a serious condition** and is **not an excuse to pressure a partner into sex**.

There are two ways to get rid of this problem--a man can masturbate until he ejaculates, or just let the feelings of arousal go away on their own (which they will). It should be noted that women can have the same pain and discomfort from getting aroused and not having an orgasm as well.

M Too much masturbation can cause the size of the penis to shrink

F There is no such thing as too much masturbation. It is a perfectly natural sexual practice and can be indulged in as often as the 'need' arises. And more importantly, medical experts say that self pleasure can in no way cause a man's penis to shrink!

M A man has to have sex every time he is aroused or he will explode

F Just because a man has an erection it does not mean that he has to have sex. Although it may be desirable there are no physical consequences if a man does not have sex when he is aroused.

M Losing weight will make a man's penis bigger

F If a man loses weight all over his body, the pad of fat that is located at the base of the penis that will also shrink. Losing this pad of fat may make the appearance of the penis larger, but it has not actually grown bigger.

M It's easy to tell if someone is gay

F Despite what you may have heard about being gay you cannot tell whether or not someone is gay, lesbian or bisexual simply by how they look, talk or act.

M All lesbians are masculine

F Sexual orientation has nothing to do with the personality traits or gender roles a person may express.

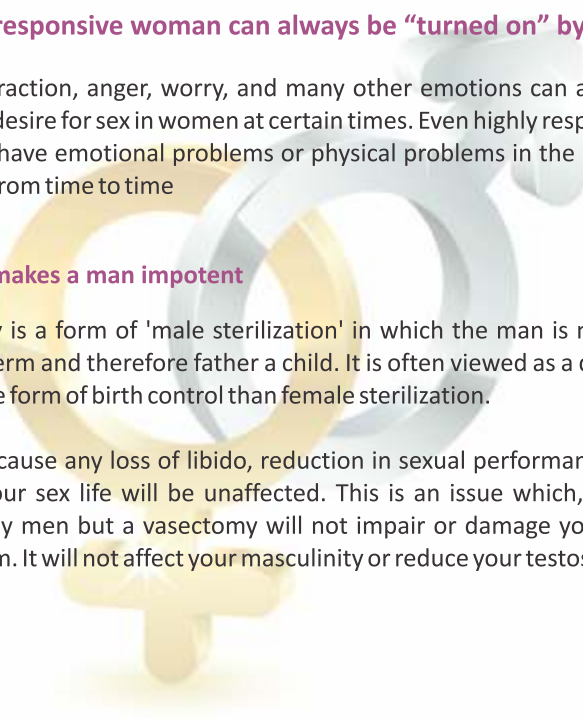
M A sexually responsive woman can always be "turned on" by her partner

F Fatigue, distraction, anger, worry, and many other emotions can and does suppress arousal and desire for sex in women at certain times. Even highly responsive, orgasmic women can have emotional problems or physical problems in the relationship with the partner from time to time

M Vasectomy makes a man impotent

F A vasectomy is a form of 'male sterilization' in which the man is no longer able to ejaculate sperm and therefore father a child. It is often viewed as a quicker, safer and more reliable form of birth control than female sterilization.

It does not cause any loss of libido, reduction in sexual performance or inability to ejaculate. Your sex life will be unaffected. This is an issue which, understandably, worries many men but a vasectomy will not impair or damage your sex life in any shape or form. It will not affect your masculinity or reduce your testosterone levels.



STIs & HIV

CARD
3A

M You can get a STI from a toilet seat

F STI means sexually transmitted infection. You get STIs by having sex (vaginal, oral or anal) or by skin-to-skin touching, not from toilet seats.

M You can't get an STI from oral sex

F You can be infected with some types of STI's during oral sex. For example, if your partner has a cold sore (oral herpes) and performs oral sex on you, you could become infected with herpes in your genital area.

M After oral sex, brushing your teeth will prevent STIs from developing

F Flossing or brushing right before or after may make your breath smell better but can also tear the lining of the mouth or gums increasing the chance of becoming infected by any virus if present. Condoms or dental dams are a good way to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections.

M If I only engage in oral or manual sex, I can't contract a sexually transmitted infection

F STIs are infections that are most commonly passed or transmitted through sex of all kinds. Unprotected oral sex have its own risks for different types of STIs.

Oral sex for instance poses the risks of ***Chlamydia***, ***Cytomegalovirus*** (cmv), ***Gonorrhea***, ***Hepatitis B***, ***Herpes***, ***Human Immunodeficiency Virus*** (HIV), and ***Syphilis***.

M You can't get an STI if your partner is a virgin

F Depending on how your partner defines being a virgin, it is possible for them to have contracted an STI. Your partner might not have had vaginal sex, but may have had oral or anal sex with someone (and still consider themselves a virgin), putting themselves at risk for an STI.

Also, there are other STIs (herpes and HPV) that are passed through skin-to-skin contact, even if no penetration has taken place.

STIs & HIV

M **Anyone with an STI can recognize the symptoms easily and know they need treatment**

F Most STI's are actually termed "asymptomatic." This means that most often they do not show visible symptoms. Some show rashes or happen with some itchiness, others will result in unusual genital discharges, but some others do not show symptoms until the person has had the infection for quite some time, at which point even an otherwise benign infection may have wrought havoc with your health. It is important to be screened regularly once you begin having sex and to use protection with every new partner until you've both had two full clear STI screenings back.

M **It's impossible to have more than one STI at the same time**

F It's actually quite possible to have two or more sexually transmitted infections at the same time, and when a person has one STI, it is easier to contract others. In the same way, it is also possible to have more than one STI's and not know because they may not have any visible symptoms. Additionally, after treatment for an STI, the infection can re-occur if you are exposed again. Some STIs like herpes and HIV have more than one strand so even if you have one strand you can be infected with another strand from a partner.

M **You can only get Genital Herpes if you have sex when your partner has an outbreak**

F Genital Herpes can be spread through contact of any infected area of the body to an uninfected person's body by touching. While it is most contagious when an active sore is present or about to appear, it can be spread when no sores are seen. The infection can be passed through kissing, anal sex, oral sex, vaginal sex, or intercourse.

M **Only slutty girls and cheating guys get STIs**

F **If only that were true!** 19 million new infections are diagnosed every year around the world. Not every one of these persons is a player. In fact, the nicest, most innocent, sweetest, smartest, coolest, "cleanest", straightest, loyal, non-cheating persons have STIs. Anyone who is sexually active can be at risk of getting an STI. This is definitely a case of "don't judge a book by its cover."

M **Two condoms are better than one**

F **You'd think so, but no!** Condom makers warn against this idea of using two condoms. Why? It is about friction. The condoms rub against each other during sex and increase the chance of one or both breaking or slipping off, thereby increasing the risk of the person's chance of getting an STI.

STIs & HIV

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CARD
3B

M Skin to skin contact is not enough. You can only get an STI from semen

F Semen and blood can spread STIs, but a person can also get certain STI's such as herpes and syphilis through skin to skin contact especially in the genital area.

For example, when herpes flares up, an active sore appears. When this sore comes into contact with your skin or other moist areas like the mouth, throat, and areas with cuts or rashes, it can spread. It can also be spread before the blisters actually form.

M Chlamydia and gonorrhea are no big deal and will go away on their own

F This is a very misleading myth. You or your sex partner may have chlamydia or gonorrhea and not know it. Left untreated, these STIs can lead to infertility and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) in women. PID harms the fallopian tubes in women and can cause a dangerous pregnancy called a "tubal pregnancy." In men, untreated chlamydia or gonorrhea can lead to an inflamed prostate, urethral scarring, infertility, or epididymitis (inflammation of the coiled tube (epididymis) at the back of the testicle that stores and carries sperm).
Both of these infections are curable with antibiotics.

M Both me and my partner have HIV...we don't need a condom

F There are many different strains of HIV. If you have HIV and having unprotected sex with your infected partner, you will be transmitting your virus to your partner and he/she will be infecting you with his/her virus. In this case both you and your partner can develop different strains of the virus which may require a different line of treatment from the one you are using. **This can result in treatment failure for both you and your partner.**

STIs & HIV

PROSTATE CANCER

Cancer is still one of the five leading causes of death in Guyana

The major cancers affecting Guyanese include Cervical, Breast and Prostate cancers. You will find on this card some Myths and Facts about cancer to share with your clients, family and friends.

M Prostate cancer only affects elderly men

F While the disease is more common with men of increasing age, men of all ages should be vigilant about personal risk factors and talk with their doctor about being screened, especially those over 40 years and those with a family history of cancer.

M Prostate cancer is common, but few men actually die from it

F Records from the Guyana Cancer Registry show that between 2000 and 2007 there were 577 cases of prostate cancer with Black men having the highest prevalence in Guyana. 427 of these have since died. Doctors have reported seeing over 50 new cases every year in Guyana. It is recommended that men should be screened regularly after age 50 for prostate cancer. Men with family history of cancer should start their screening at age 40. Early detection can be a lifesaver against prostate cancer.

M Prostate cancer will ruin my sex life

F During some prostate cancer treatments, the nerves that surround the prostate and control the ability for erections may be affected. Your ability to regain control of erectile function also depends on your age and whether you had erectile problems prior to surgery. Most cases of post-treatment erectile dysfunction can be managed by a urologist. Talk to your doctor about the specific details of your condition, including your treatment options and their possible side effects.

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT CANCER

CARD

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Cancer is still one of the five leading causes of death in Guyana

The major cancers affecting Guyanese include Cervical, Breast and Prostate cancers. Many young women below age 30 are found to be suffering and some die from cervical cancer. You will find on this card some Myths and Facts about cancer to share with your clients, family and friends.

M Cervical cancer cannot be prevented

F Infection with the Human Papilloma Virus or HPV causes most cervical cancer to develop. This virus is transmitted sexually by both men and women, Cervical cancer usually develops slowly after persistent infection with HPV and will first appear as a precancerous condition called dysplasia. If dysplasia is detected early, it can be effectively treated to prevent cervical cancer from developing. Screening with Pap smears, VIA (Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid) and tests for HPV detect these pre-cancerous conditions so patients can be treated early. Cervical cancer can also be prevented with a newly available vaccine.

A woman can reduce her risk of these problems by limiting the number of sexual partners over a lifetime, by not smoking cigarettes and by following accepted screening guidelines. Each of these behaviors relates to known risk factors for this disease.

M I'm too young to worry about cervical cancer

F Studies indicate that the average age of cervical cancer patients is 48, however, most women who get infected with the HPV virus (which cause cervical cancer) contract it in their teens or early 20s. although the cancer itself may not be present.

M I have pain in my breast, so I must have breast cancer

F Pain in the breast is common and can be caused by several things not associated with breast cancer. You should note when the pain occurs in relation to the menstrual cycle, how long it lasts and if there is anything that seems to trigger the pain or relieve it. Often times, breast pain will resolve on its own, but, if it does not, you should see your healthcare provider. *(continued)*

CANCER

Some common causes of breast pain include: hormonal changes during menstruation, birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy, weight gain, fluid retention (swelling), or a poorly fitting bra. There is even some research to say caffeine can contribute to water retention that leads to breast pain.

M A teenage girl who finds a “lump” in her breast must have breast cancer

F Although breast cancer can occasionally affect women as young as their mid-twenties, it would be unlikely for a teenager to have breast cancer. A lump found in a teenager is usually a fibroadenoma, which is not a cancer. These lumps feel hard and round, but do not usually cause any pain. They can be surgically removed if they become bothersome.

M Having a mammogram causes breast cancer or causes an already existing cancer to spread

F Mammography does not cause breast cancer. The compression (flattening) of the breast tissue during a mammogram does not cause breast cancer and does not cause a known breast cancer to spread. Mammography does expose a woman to a low amount of radiation at level far below any regulatory limits. However, if you are pregnant you should notify your health care provider prior to having a mammogram.

M Men do not get breast cancer

F Although possible, breast cancer is rare but can still affect men. Typically breast cancer affects men over 60 but that does not mean that men as young as 20 cannot get it.

M There are no warning signs of ovarian cancer

F Symptoms may be there, but they are subtle and easy to ignore or confuse with other conditions. If a woman's abdomen is large or bloated, she has difficulty eating or is always feeling full, or she has to urinate frequently and urgently – these are red flags and should be checked out. Unfortunately, many women think they're just bloated or tired and ignore these signs. These signs and symptoms can also be easily missed by doctors and patients if they are not taken seriously; this can cause the diagnosis to be made too late when the cancer is advanced.

M Mostly promiscuous women get cervical cancer

F Having many sexual partners over the course of a woman's lifetime is a risk factor for cervical cancer since the risk of HPV and other STIs is increased. However, women who have unprotected sex with only one partner can develop cervical cancer from HPV also. There are many factors in cervical cancer development.