

STD? Not Me!

by Amber Torvalson, Peer Health Educator

So, you don't think you have a sexually transmitted disease (STD), eh? You don't have any of the classic warning signs: discharge from the penis or nasty smelling/looking vaginal discharge; itching; insufferable burnin' when you pee; sores on and around your genitals; abdominal pain.

Fact is, if you're sexually active, you just might still have an STD. The majority of the time, STDs are asymptomatic. That means no symptoms -- no yick discharge, no itchin', nothin' -- which makes regular testing for these diseases pretty darn important if you're sexually active.

Why? Because if STDs aren't treated they can cause some serious problems -- pelvic inflammatory disease and ectopic pregnancies in women; painful, swollen testicles (ouch!) and urinary tract problems in men; and arthritis and infertility in both women and men. Yeah -- infertility -- as in no babies, ever.

So, are you burning to know where to go to be tested for STDs? Heck, it's the same place you'd go for treatment. If you're on campus, it would be the University Health Centre (2nd Flr SUB). Off campus there's the Capital Health STD Clinic downtown or your regular doctor.

What's even better than treatment of STDs? Why, it's prevention. The pill gives you no protection against STDs, but the handy-dandy condom works swell for this (that is, if it's used correctly every time). Read the enclosed instructions! Key things to remember here: squeeze the air out of the tip to leave space for ejaculation, and use only water-based lubricants, (That means no vaseline, no peanut butter or any other such oil based products.) Worried about the cost of condoms? Well, you needn't be. The University Health Centre pharmacy, in the bookstore in SUB, has condoms for the cheap cheap price of

25 cents. That's right, two bits. And those kooky Peer Health Educators are always givin' away free samples.

Condoms are highly effective in preventing many STDs like HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhea. But they don't protect as well against the critter variety of STDs (eg. scabies or crabs) or if there are external herpes lesions or genital warts.



Abstinence is a great alternative too. Abstinence -- ughh, you shudder as you clink the chastity belt shut and toss away the key --right? Well, let's get a clear picture of what abstinence means in terms of health. Abstinence doesn't have to mean an absence of all sexual activity. In health terms, abstinence means no exchange of body fluids, and no penetration of vagina or anus (repeat it to yourself, "no penetration"). That's really not a huge restriction; there's still a myriad of sexy activities you can partake in, besides your regular romping, that will keep you smilin' and STD free. Use your imagination. But be aware that some STDs can be spread through skin-to-skin contact, so even abstinence is not 100% risk-free.

Bottom line? -- Get tested, protect yourself, and be okee dokee STD free.

For more information on avoiding unplanned pregnancy, managing stress, and generally staying healthy and productive as a student, visit the Student Health Resource Centre, 2-300 SUB, or surf over to www.ualberta.ca/HealthInfo