

I regularly get tested for STIs and am told that I'm the poster boy for sexual safety. I've always been the kind of person who in a relationship, pretty much always has The Talk before sex happens. The Talk includes The Plan: condoms, birth control, mutual respect, you know how it goes if you've had it.

A few months ago, I started a relationship with one of my best friends from college. She didn't show any symptoms and she was completely unaware that oral herpes could be spread from mouth to genitals. We practiced safe vaginal sex and had unprotected oral sex. I was unaware that she had oral herpes, but I suppose I wouldn't have considered it a deal-breaker if I had known. I found out that she gave me oral herpes (HSV-1), but what was oral herpes for her would be genital herpes for me. Because I have had few sexual partners and I get tested often, I know this is the only possible scenario, however strange it is.

She was kind. She came with me to the doctor and went with me to fill the prescription. She felt guilty, but I told her not to worry about it. I meant it.??I wasn't mad. I was scared, though. And I was embarrassed - I've only talked about it with her, and now with this website. The primary infection was very painful but the symptoms didn't last long enough for a dermatologist to even identify it. The symptoms came back once or twice, or maybe I just imagined it. Any time I suspect it's about to come back, I take a Valtrex®. I'm looking into possibilities for once-a-day treatment.

She and I broke up a few weeks ago and we're still friends. It's funny, even though she's not The One, on some level I entertained staying with her because of the relative lack of sexual limitations we had between us, the fact that there's no sexual blame game and we can continue as before. But we'd be staying together for the wrong reasons, and good sex only gets you so far. Love is a package deal.

I now find myself in the awkward position of having to add the fact that I have HSV-1 to The Talk. I'm not scared of being rejected. That I can handle. But I am scared that I'll never have a sex life like I did before. And I'm scared that I'll pass it on to someone very special to me.

I'm currently tempted to give in to the knee-jerk reaction and take a break from dating for a while so I can get my head together. I've been looking at websites but trying to find hard facts about preventing herpes transmission is like trying to nail jelly to the wall. I hope that when I get back

into dating that it's with someone who's understanding, or who had cold sores when she was little.??I guess I'll tell you how it goes. As the ever-iconic Jerry Springer said, "Take care of yourselves and each other."