

## Genital Herpes - can you have a sexual relationship?

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### Description:

*The herpes simplex virus causes genital herpes. There are many types of herpes viruses. Both herpes simplex type 1 (HSV1) and herpes simplex type 2 (HSV2) can infect the genital area.*

*HSV1 commonly causes cold sores, and tends to occur in the upper half of the body, mainly around the lips and mouth. HSV1 can also infect the genital area. HSV2 is more commonly the cause of genital herpes. Both viruses are passed from one person to another by close body contact.*

### Tips

If you have herpes, it is important that you tell your sexual partner(s). They may be at risk of getting herpes and passing it on to other sexual partners. It is natural to feel anxious or embarrassed about telling others. However, if you are well informed and have a positive attitude, partners are likely to respond well and respect you for telling them.

Many people cope well with genital herpes, informing their partners and avoiding sex at times of highest risk of passing the infection on. Genital herpes is quite common. For many people, genital herpes becomes a minor annoyance that they are able to work around.

However, finding out you have herpes maybe distressing. It may take a while to adjust to knowing that you have herpes and come to terms with the limitations it may place on your sex life. Also, people who experience frequent recurrences of genital herpes can feel frustrated and distressed. Talking to a health professional who is trained in sexual health and discussing treatment options is worthwhile. People may find talking to a counsellor helpful.

### Helpful Hints

A person with herpes needs to be aware of symptoms of an outbreak to protect partners from infection. However, it is important to note that herpes can be passed on even if there are no symptoms or visible signs of an outbreak on the skin.

To help reduce the risk of transmission:

- do not let herpes sores come into contact with another person
- avoid kissing and oral sex if there are herpes lesions on the mouth or lips
- avoid sex during an outbreak of genital herpes or as soon as you become aware of symptoms.

These suggestions should be followed until one week after the sores have completely gone.

Condoms help to prevent the transmission of herpes. However, because herpes is transmitted by skin to skin contact, transmission can still occur even when condoms are used because the condom may not cover affected areas. If you are giving a man oral sex (his penis in your mouth) then he will need to wear a condom. It does not matter whether you are male or female, if you put your mouth in contact with your partners anus or vulva while having sex you will need to use a dental dam.

### Other Resources

[Queensland Health Sexual Health website](#)

### Related Content

[Genital herpes fact sheet](#)

[Genital herpes and pregnancy fact sheet](#)

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Safe sex fact sheet