

How much has herpes cost me financially and emotionally? 30 years ago, I was a new divorcee enjoying my new sexual freedom. Did I have multiple sex partners? Why, yes. Didn't our sisters tell us it was okay? Little did I know that (along with prevention of pregnancy) came another responsibility: prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Diagnosis came from my gynecologist in 1983. This young M.D. made me feel like a leper and left me untreated. After 2 years of almost unbearable pain and suffering, a friend referred me to her healthcare provider in a large city nearby. I began treatment and have learned 1) that good people have herpes and 2) that herpes outbreaks can be controlled and treated.

Thirty years later I am happy and healthy and retired. I am in a 23-year relationship with a loving partner who accepts me along with the fact I have herpes. As a matter of fact, telling a prospective sex partner about your disease separates the grain from the chaff. The good, psychologically healthy ones rise to the top.

Sex poses risks, and though we may consider ourselves well educated and informed, STIs and their prevention are information that we must seek out - usually when it's too late. Here's to a STI packet in every mailbox, on computer pop up screens, as preliminary reading before joining Facebook, anywhere people of all ages travel in the information age.

Herpes? Well, I certainly could have done without it. My IRA may have been a bit larger. More important has been the way I have been able to touch others' lives and they my life. Finding a knowledgeable, compassionate physician was integral to this "happy" ending.