

Healthwise

A PERS Health Insurance Program newsletter



SPRING 2010

Sexually transmitted diseases and seniors

The subject matter of this article is of a sensitive nature. Recently, information was released indicating that sexually transmitted diseases are a growing concern in the senior population. This article has been provided to protect your health and is not intended to offend or cause distress.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or background.

Also known as “venereal diseases,” these infections are passed from person to person through sexual intercourse, genital contact, or contact with semen, vaginal fluids or blood.

STD increase

Most STDs occur in people younger than 25, but older age is no protection. Two years ago, the journal, Sexually Transmitted Infections, published a study stating that in less than a decade, STD rates more than doubled among people aged 45 and older.

While physical intimacy does decline with age, about 20 percent of people over 50 have sex weekly, and more than half of people over 60 have sex at least once a month.

Even if you no longer engage in physical relationships, you could still have a sexually transmitted infection and not realize it —

especially if you were never screened or were never treated for an infection you had when you were younger. The long-term side effects of diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and syphilis may be easily mistaken for other diseases of aging.

The rise in STDs among older Americans can be tied to changing social norms, the country’s high divorce rate and online dating sites, among other factors.

Safer sex practices are low among seniors. As fear of pregnancy diminishes with age, so does the use of condoms, putting sexually active individuals at risk. More than 60 percent of the over-50 group does not use condoms. Many healthcare professionals are quick to educate teens about the risk of STDs and HIV but neglect their older patients.

It’s important to talk with your healthcare provider about STDs. If you have never been tested, ask about the standard screening process.

Medication information for PERS ODS Prescription Drug Plan members

For a complete list of brand and generic medications covered under your current PERS prescription drug benefit, please visit ODS online at www.odscompanies.com/members. Log on to myODS, and consult the PERS Prescription Drug Plan list of covered drugs.

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Ask questions

Prevention is easier than treatment. When starting a new physical relationship, take time with your partner to talk about STDs. Discuss your sexual histories, including whether you've ever been exposed to or had an STD. Asking these questions may be difficult or even a little embarrassing, but it's important for your health and well-being.

Questions to ask someone before having sex include:

- How many people have you had intimate relations with?
- Have you had intimate relations without a condom?
- Have you ever had unprotected oral sex?
- Have you had more than one sex partner at a time?
- Have you ever injected illegal drugs, or have you had intimate relations with someone who injects drugs?
- Have you ever had unprotected sex with a prostitute?
- Have you had a test for HIV? What were the results?
- Have you ever had an STD? Was it treated and cured?

Reduce your risk

Remember that it's possible to

have an infection without knowing it. To reduce your risk of contracting an STD or spreading an infection to someone else:

- Get tested. Screening for STDs is an essential part of healthcare for sexually active men and women. Some STDs can take up to six months before they can be detected. Even if you and your partner have been tested, use condoms for all sex until you and your partner haven't had sex with another person for six months. Then get tested again.
- Use latex condoms every time you have intercourse — vaginal, anal and oral — until you are sure neither you nor your partner has any STDs and that neither of you will have unprotected sexual contact with anyone else while your relationship lasts.
- Do not rely on spermicides, "natural" or lambskin condoms, or a diaphragm to protect against STDs. If a spermicide irritates the skin or tissues in your genital area, it may increase your risk of becoming infected. Other than abstinence, latex condoms provide the best protection against STDs.
- Avoid unprotected vaginal, anal or oral intercourse with anyone whose sexual

history may not be risk-free or who has sores of the genitals or mouth.

- Have one sex partner at a time. The safest sex is with one partner who has sex only with you. Every time you add a new partner, you are being exposed to all of the diseases that all of their partners may have.
- Never share needles, syringes, razors or other personal items that could be contaminated with blood.

Seek medical help

Home treatment is never appropriate for an STD. All STDs need to be diagnosed and treated by a healthcare professional. Your partner also may need to be treated, even if he or she has no symptoms — this is so your partner won't reinfect you or develop serious complications.

Call your doctor if you:

- Notice sores, redness or growths on your partner's or your own genitals
- Suspect you have been exposed to an STD
- Have behaviors that put you at risk for exposure to HIV
- Have symptoms, including weight loss, fever, diarrhea, cough or swollen lymph nodes, that do not go away after a short period and do not seem to

be related to another illness. Early symptoms of HIV infection can mimic the flu.

Stay safe

Physical intimacy can be an important part of your life, no matter what your age. It's important to learn how to engage in it safely so that it enhances your health rather than damages it.

For more information, check out these Web sites:

- kp.org/STDs
- cdc.gov/std/general
- healthtools.aarp.org/adamcontent/safe-sex

Article courtesy of Kaiser Permanente

Eye health

Overview

Many people have minor eye problems, such as eyestrain; irritated eyes; or itchy, scaly eyelids (blepharitis). These problems may be ongoing (chronic) but usually are not serious. Home treatment can relieve the symptoms of many minor eye problems.

Sudden problems, such as new vision changes, pain in the eye or increased drainage, are often more serious and need to be evaluated by a doctor.

Prevention

Take good care of your eyes to prevent eye problems. Injuries from ultraviolet (UV) light can be prevented by wearing sunglasses that block UV rays

and by wearing broad-brimmed hats. Be aware that the eye can be injured from sun glare while boating, sunbathing or skiing. Use eye protection while you are under tanning lamps or using tanning booths.*

Wear goggles or protective glasses when you are handling chemicals, operating power tools, hammering nails or playing sports such as racquetball or hockey, which involve the risk of a blow to the eye. Wear goggles or protective glasses at all times if you have only one functional eye.

Get vision checkups every two years if you wear glasses and every five years if you don't wear glasses. If you have a family history of eye disorders, diabetes or a diagnosed vision disorder such as glaucoma, cataracts or macular degeneration, have your vision checked according to the schedule your eye-care professional recommends.

Keep your blood pressure under control. High blood pressure can damage the blood vessels that supply blood to the eye.

People who have diabetes are at risk for a vision problem called "diabetic retinopathy," which is a complication of having high blood sugar over a long time. People who have diabetes need regular eye exams so that the early stages of diabetic retinopathy can be detected and, in some cases, treated. They also need to

keep their blood sugar levels as close to normal as possible to prevent blood vessel damage from long-term high blood sugar.

Many people think of lutein as "the eye vitamin." Lutein is a carotenoid vitamin, which means it is related to beta-carotene and vitamin A. Foods rich in lutein include broccoli, spinach, kale, corn, orange bell pepper, kiwi, grapes, orange juice, zucchini and squash. Lutein is absorbed best when it is taken with a high-fat meal.**

Consuming lutein as part of the diet might help prevent age-related macular degeneration (AMD), but it's not known whether taking lutein supplements works as well. Some research indicates that taking lutein supplements (10 mg per day for 12 months) might help decrease symptoms of AMD, but more information is needed. Lutein supplements don't seem to keep AMD from getting worse.**

Lutein is possibly effective in reducing the risk of developing eye cataracts, when high amounts are obtained from the diet. It is not known if lutein supplements offer the same benefit.**

By Healthwise author: Jan Nissl, R.N. Printed with permission by Clear One Health Plans.

** PERS and the PERS Health Plans do not recommend tanning.*

*** Information courtesy of WebMD.*

Numbers

PERS

www.pershealth.com
P.O. Box 40187
Portland, OR 97240-0187
503-224-7377
800-768-7377

PERS Pension Office

www.oregon.gov/pers

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 23700
Tigard, OR 97281-3700

Street Address

11410 S.W. 68th Parkway
Tigard, OR 97223-8634
503-598-7377
888-320-7377

Kaiser Permanente

www.kaiserpermanente.org
500 N.E. Multnomah, Ste. 100
Portland, OR 97232-2099
503-813-2000
800-813-2000

Providence Health Plan

www.providence.org
3601 S.W. Murray Blvd. #10
Beaverton, OR 97005
503-574-8000
800-603-2340

Mailing Address

P.O. Box 4327
Portland, OR 97208-4327

Claims

P.O. Box 3125
Portland, OR 97208-3125
Providence RN
503-574-6520
800-700-0481

Clear One Health Plans

www.clearonehp.com
2965 N.E. Conners Ave.
Bend, OR 97701
541-385-5315
888-863-3637

Claims

P.O. Box 7469
Bend, OR 97701

ODS

www.odscompanies.com
601 S.W. Second Ave.
Portland, OR 97204-3156

Medical

503-243-3880
800-962-1533 (Oregon)
800-852-5195 (National)

Dental

503-243-4494
800-452-1058 (Oregon)
800-852-5195 (National)

Pharmacy

503-265-4709
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