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# THE H FACTOR



1 in 8

Australians has  
genital herpes

Women are  
twice as likely  
as men to have  
the virus

1 in 6

women aged over  
25 has genital herpes  
and 1 in 5 women  
between 35 and 44  
has the virus

80%

don't know they  
have it and could  
potentially be  
passing it on

## Healthy sex

Healthy sex is about taking control of your sexual lifestyle. It's more than the number of partners or the types of relationships you have, and it's broader than an intimate relationship with someone you love or enjoy being with.

Healthy sex is about being informed, looking after yourself and your partners, and being aware of the risks. It also means having regular check-ups and getting tested for STIs.

This booklet provides useful information about genital herpes – the second most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in Australia. Whether you have genital herpes, know someone with the virus, or just want to be better informed for a healthier sex life, it's important you have the facts.

Hopefully, after reading this booklet, you will feel more confident in your knowledge of genital herpes – how it is transmitted, what you can do to protect yourself and others, and what treatments are available.

This booklet explores the emotional and physical aspects of genital herpes and has helpful advice for everyone who wants to get on with their lives.

If you have herpes,  
there are simple and  
effective steps you can  
take to reduce the risk  
of passing it on – so  
you can go on enjoying  
your sex life

A diagnosis of genital herpes can be quite upsetting and the emotional impact can be worse than the actual symptoms. This is usually the result of knowing little about the virus.

The symptoms of genital herpes vary enormously. It can show up as blisters or sores, but it can also just produce a mild rash.

### HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

Genital herpes is transmitted via skin-to-skin contact during genital, anal and oral sex. The virus can be spread just before, during and after an outbreak, and is most often transmitted when there are no symptoms.

Due to the high prevalence of genital herpes, it's hardly surprising that thousands of Australians become infected every year.

The risk of transmission can be reduced by the following precautions:

- Don't have sex while you have symptoms.
- Use condoms. They're not 100 per cent effective, but they provide some protection.
- Take daily antiviral tablets.

### WHAT IS GENITAL HERPES?

Genital herpes is caused by the herpes simplex virus – the same virus that can cause facial cold sores – and is just one of several herpes viruses, including chickenpox. Once you've contracted the virus, it stays in your body for life. In fact, most people are carrying at least one of the herpes viruses.

Two types of herpes simplex can cause genital herpes:

- Type 1 (HSV-1) is carried by about 80 per cent of us and is the primary cause of cold sores.
- Type 2 (HSV-2) affects one in eight people and is generally associated with the genital region.

The good news is, both types can be treated in a similar manner and respond well to antiviral therapy.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Many people don't realise they have genital herpes because the symptoms can easily be mistaken for other STIs or fungal infections.

The virus affects different people in different ways, and can affect the same person differently over time. The first outbreak is usually the most severe and symptoms usually reduce in severity over time. For some people, the first episode is similar to the flu.

The classic symptoms of genital herpes are cold sore-like blisters that burst and leave painful ulcers, taking about 10 days to heal. However, other symptoms may include:

- redness or a rash
- painful ulcers
- chafing
- pain when urinating
- small cracks in the skin
- tiny sores

### Getting tested

Herpes testing is not a part of standard sexually transmitted disease screening, so you need to ask your doctor specifically for a test.

While a blood test will show if you are carrying HSV-1 or HSV-2, it can't indicate whether you have been infected orally or genitally.

The most effective way to identify the virus is to see a doctor when you have symptoms and have a swab taken from the affected area.

There is no cure for herpes, but effective antiviral treatment is available

Many people with the virus have very mild symptoms or none at all, and they often don't realise they are infected

## GENITAL HERPES AND YOUR LIFE

With the right treatment and lifestyle, you can enjoy a normal life, including a healthy sex life.

### Relieving pain and discomfort

If you have painful symptoms, you might try:

- taking aspirin or paracetamol for fever or aching pain
- applying ice or anaesthetic creams directly to the sores
- washing the affected area with salt water
- having warm showers when you are most uncomfortable
- wearing loose-fitting, cotton underwear

### Managing the symptoms

Antiviral treatments can relieve the pain of sores and block the development of the virus. Discuss this option with your doctor.

Genital herpes is an emotionally charged issue, so it is essential that you get accurate information to help you make the right decisions.

To find out more, ask your doctor for a Facts Pack, contact your nearest support group or visit some of these websites:

- **facts.com.au** – for comprehensive information on genital herpes
- **ahmf.com.au** – the Australian Herpes Management Forum
- **livingsphere.com** – information, an online forum and dating services for people living with herpes

## YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

For many people with genital herpes, the greatest worry is the effect it will have on their relationships, but good relationships are built on honesty and trust, and having herpes is not something you can, or should, conceal from your partner.

The impact of not telling your partner could be worse – they may suspect something is wrong, wonder why you don't trust them, or assume something worse.

How you tackle the subject is up to you, but it's a good idea to equip your partner with information and focus on the positive – there are simple treatment options available that mean the virus doesn't have to impact their life in a negative way.

**National  
Herpes Day  
13 October**

Did you know

**1** in **8**  
of us has  
**genital**  
herpes?

If you have symptoms like tingling, itching or redness that keep coming back, it's well worth checking them out. If it turns out that – like 1 in 8 of us – you have genital herpes, simple daily treatment can relieve the symptoms and even stop them reappearing.

[thefacts.com.au](http://thefacts.com.au)



**See your doctor**

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