

Sex, Safety & the Microbiome

How Partners Change Your Internal Ecosystem

A FREE Pocket Guide by [Goddess Speaks Fire](#)

Educational guide, not medical advice.

If you experience symptoms or concerns, please feel free to consult a healthcare professional or your local health department.

Free and anonymous options exist.

Welcome (Read Me First)

Your body is not dirty. Your body is wise. This guide explains in plain language how the vaginal microbiome works, why balance matters, how partners can shift it, and how routine testing protects **all bodies** (across gender and orientation).

You'll learn:

- What BV (bacterial vaginosis) is and isn't.
- How sex and everyday factors can disrupt balance.
- What to ask for at the doctor (complete panel list + simple explanations).
- How STIs can show up in **the throat, rectum, and eyes**, not just the genitals.
- Where to get **free/low-cost/anonymous** testing.
- Conversation scripts + green flags vs red flags.

Inclusive language: We say “people with vaginas” and “people with penises.”

All bodies deserve safety, transparency, and respect.

PAGE 2 The Garden Metaphor (Science 101)

Think of a vagina like a garden.

- **Flowers = Lactobacillus (helpful bacteria).** The flowers keep the garden slightly acidic (protective pH).
- **Soil = pH.** When pH is healthy, harmful bacteria don't overgrow.
- **Weeds = Other bacteria that can take over when the balance is disturbed.**

When weeds outnumber flowers, the garden is out of balance. In medicine, that imbalance is called **bacterial vaginosis (BV)**. BV is **common**, can be **asymptomatic** or cause odor/discharge/irritation, and is **not** an STI, but sexual activity often influences it.

PAGE 3 What Throws Off Balance (Any Gender Can Contribute)

- **Semen (alkaline)** can tip the pH.
- **New or multiple partners / unprotected sex** introduces new bacteria.
- **Sex toys** shared or not cleaned between bodies/sites.
- **Antibiotics** (they kill good bacteria too).
- **Douching/scented products** (strip the protective flora).
- **Stress + hormonal shifts** (period, postpartum, menopause).
- **Smoking & certain IUDs** (risk varies—talk to your clinician).

Body wisdom: If imbalance keeps returning, your body may be signaling that something in the sexual/relational environment is off.

PAGE 4 BV: Fast Facts

- **Not an STI** but **linked to sexual activity**.
- More common with a **new partner**, **no condoms**, or a partner with **other partners**.
- It can increase the risk of acquiring STIs and cause pregnancy complications if untreated.
- **Treatment** is usually antibiotics prescribed by a clinician. Recurrent BV is common, and prevention habits matter (condoms, avoid douching, discuss partner practices)

Not proof of infidelity. But new/recurrent BV can be a clue that new bacteria are being introduced.

PAGE 5 Testing Is Self-Love (For Everyone)

Discussing and receiving routine testing is as normal as a dental cleaning. It's not about mistrust, it's about mutual care.

Green flags:

- "Let's both get a full panel. Want to go together?"
- Shares results without defensiveness.
- Yearly testing even if "monogamous."

Red flags:

- Shaming you for asking.
- Refusing testing or delaying after sex has started.

Minimum rhythm: Yearly full-panel testing for sexually active adults; sooner with a new partner, symptoms, or exposure.

PAGE 6 What to Ask Your Provider For

Get tested. Know what you're getting tested for. Know why you're getting tested.

Not sure what to say? Ask your provider to:

Please order a **full STI panel**.

- I want testing for **HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomoniasis, hepatitis B & C, and HPV** as appropriate for my age and cervix (if you have one)
- If I have sores, please test for **herpes (HSV-1 & HSV-2)**.
- I'd also like **BV** testing if I have symptoms.
- Given my sexual practices, please include **throat and rectal swabs**, not just urine or vaginal/cervical tests.
- And I'd like to discuss **Mycoplasma genitalium/ureaplasma** if symptoms persist.

What each one is & why it matters

Chlamydia: Often silent; can cause PID, infertility, ectopic pregnancy. Treatable.

Gonorrhea: Often silent; rising drug resistance; can spread to joints/blood; infertility.

Syphilis: Painless sore → rash → organ/brain damage if untreated; can lie dormant for years.

HIV: Weakens the immune system; early treatment = long, healthy life.

Trichomoniasis (trich): Common, often silent; increases HIV risk; treatable.

HPV: Some strains cause warts; high-risk strains can cause cervical/anal/throat cancers; Pap/HPV tests prevent cancer.

Herpes (HSV-1/2): Blisters/sores or silent; lifelong but manageable.

Hepatitis B & C: Liver damage, cancer risk; Hep B vaccine prevents; Hep C is curable.

BV (imbalance): Not an STI, but increases STI risk; treat recurrently with clinician guidance.

Mycoplasma genitalium / Ureaplasma: "Hidden" bacteria; can cause urethritis, pelvic pain, infertility, pregnancy issues; needs **specific** testing and targeted antibiotics.

Chlamydia

Sites: Vagina, cervix, penis/urethra, rectum, throat, eyes.

Symptoms:

- Vaginas: Discharge, burning, pelvic pain—or silent.
- Penises: Burning, discharge, testicular pain—or silent.
- Rectum: Pain, bleeding, discharge—or silent.
- Throat: Usually silent; sometimes sore throat.
- Eyes: Redness, pain, discharge (can threaten vision).

Silent? Often silent.

Consequences: Infertility, ectopic pregnancy, chronic pelvic pain, and reactive arthritis.

Testing: Urine or swabs (cervix/urethra, rectum, throat, eye if symptoms)

- **Ask your provider for three-site testing.**

Gonorrhea

Sites: Vagina, cervix, penis/urethra, rectum, throat, eyes.

Symptoms:

- Vaginas: Burning, unusual discharge, pelvic pain—or silent.
- Penises: Burning, discharge, swollen testicles—or silent.
- Rectum: Itching, bleeding, pain, discharge.
- Throat: Usually silent; sometimes sore throat.
- Eyes: Severe pain, swelling, pus-like discharge (can cause blindness)

Silent? Frequently silent.

Consequences: Infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, joint infection, sepsis, and blindness.

Testing: Urine or swabs (cervix/urethra, rectum, throat, eye if symptoms).

- **Ask your provider for three-site testing.**

Syphilis

Sites: Genitals, anus, rectum, mouth, throat, and later spreads through the body.

Symptoms:

Painless sore (chancre) at the site of infection.

Secondary stage: Rash, hair loss, flu-like illness.

Latent stage: No symptoms, can last for years.

Silent? Yes, it can hide for decades.

Consequences: Brain, nerve, heart, and eye damage, paralysis, insanity, and death.

Testing: Blood test, swab of sore if present.

Herpes (HSV-1 & HSV-2)

Sites: Genitals, mouth, rectum, eyes, fingers.

Symptoms: Painful blisters or sores, burning, itching, or silent.

Silent? Yes, many carry herpes without symptoms.

Consequences: Recurrent outbreaks, pain, neonatal herpes (life-threatening for infants).

Testing: Swab of an active sore, blood test for antibodies.

HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

Sites: Genitals, cervix, anus, throat, mouth.

Symptoms: Often none, sometimes genital warts.

Silent? Yes, many strains clear unnoticed.

Consequences: Cervical, anal, penile, and throat cancers.

Testing: Pap and HPV test for people with a cervix, anal Pap for high-risk groups, no routine throat test.

Trichomoniasis (Trich)

Sites: Vagina, penis/urethra, rectum.

Symptoms:

Vaginas: Itching, odor, frothy yellow-green discharge, or silent.

Penises: Burning, irritation, discharge, or silent.

Silent? Very common.

Consequences: Increased HIV risk, pregnancy complications, chronic irritation.

Testing: Vaginal swab or urine, sometimes urethral or rectal swab.

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

Sites: Whole body, spread through blood, sexual fluids, breast milk.

Symptoms: Early flu-like illness, then long silent phase.

Silent? Yes, often for years.

Consequences: Untreated leads to AIDS, severe infections, cancers, and death.

Testing: Blood test or oral swab, rapid or lab.

Hepatitis B & C

Sites: Liver, spread through blood and sexual fluids.

Symptoms: Often none, sometimes fatigue, nausea, jaundice.

Silent? Commonly silent.

Consequences: Chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death.

Testing: Blood test.

Note: Hepatitis B is preventable with a vaccine. Hepatitis C is curable if caught early

Mycoplasma genitalium & Ureaplasma

Sites: Urethra, cervix, vagina, penis, rectum.

Symptoms: Burning with urination, discharge, pelvic or testicular pain, or silent.

Silent? Very often.

Consequences: Infertility, chronic pelvic pain, pregnancy complications, and miscarriage.

Testing: Specific urine or swab test, not included in standard panels, must be requested.

Think of STI testing like cancer screening: prevention saves lives.

Where to Get Tested

Primary Care / OB-GYN / Sexual Health Clinic: Ask for a **full STI panel**; advocate even if you say “monogamous.”

Public Health Departments: Often **free or sliding-scale**; anonymous options in many regions.

Planned Parenthood / Community Clinics: Confidential, LGBTQ+ affirming care.

At-Home Kits: Discreet (pharmacy/mail-in); choose kits that include **throat/rectal** swabs if relevant.

[Quest Health](#) allows you to order your own testing and have it collected at home.

If you feel dismissed or unsafe: Ask for a different provider or clinic. You deserve competent, respectful care.

Talk Before Fireworks

Normalize conversations before sex begins (it's harder later)

You: "I care about both of us. Let's get tested together before we're intimate."

Green flag: "Absolutely. Let's book it."

Red flag: "Why don't you trust me?" / stalling / shaming.

You: "Please include throat and rectal swabs that match our sexual practices."

You: "Even though we're exclusive/married, I want to make yearly testing our normal."

Consent & safety are a love language for straight, queer, trans, nonbinary, monogamous, or poly relationships.

Daily Prevention & Body Listening

Barriers: Condoms/dental dams; change condoms between sites (oral→vaginal→anal).

Clean toys: Between partners and between sites; consider condoms on toys.

Skip douching/scents; gentle external washing only.

Consider probiotics (ask your clinician).

Stress care, sleep, movement. Your nervous system and microbiome are linked.

If your body whispers “something’s off,” don’t override it. Seek testing and support.



Resources & Crisis Support

In the U.S.


 U.S. National Sexual Health Hotline → 1-800-232-4636

 Planned Parenthood → plannedparenthood.org


 CDC STI/STD Info (plain-language fact sheets) → cdc.gov/std

 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs): Community clinics that provide free or sliding-scale STI testing, primary care, and reproductive health services, no insurance required. 
Find one: findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov

 Local Public Health Departments: Every county/city has one. Many offer free or anonymous STI testing, HIV rapid tests, PrEP access, condoms, and sometimes same-day treatment.

 U.S. Domestic Violence Hotline → 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or thehotline.org

Globally.

 Search “sexual health clinic + your city/country” or check your Ministry/Department of Health website.

NGOs & Community Groups often provide free testing and support worldwide

Terrence Higgins Trust in the UK

AIDES in France

HIV Ireland

AIDS Healthcare Foundation in multiple regions

No insurance? → FQHCs, public health departments, Planned Parenthood.

No privacy? → At-home kits (some anonymous, mail-in).

No money? → FQHCs, public health departments, and NGOs.

No safety? → Confidential hotlines can connect you to safe care pathways.

Other free resources

- [Half Loved, Fully Confused™ \(free journal\)](#)
- [Reading Between the Red Flags™ \(free guide\)](#)

Please support our mission, if you're able: [Whispered Ink Journals Etsy Shop](#).

Every purchase helps fund free resources for the community.

My Favorite Trauma Healing Books

These are invitations, not assignments.

[The Body Keeps the Score – Bessel van der Kolk](#)

The landmark overview of how trauma imprints brain, mind, and body helps you see symptoms as adaptations.

[What Happened to You? – Oprah Winfrey & Bruce D. Perry](#)

A compassionate, conversational entry point that reframes “What’s wrong with you?” into “What happened to you?”

[Waking the Tiger – Peter A. Levine \(with Ann Frederick\)](#)

The classic somatic text on completing survival responses and restoring innate rhythm.

[My Grandmother’s Hands – Resmaa Menakem](#)

A body-centered approach to healing racialized trauma—personal, communal, and cultural—through somatic practice.

[The Myth of Normal – Gabor Maté \(with Daniel Maté\)](#)

How modern culture wires stress into our bodies, and what compassionate healing can look like.

[No Bad Parts – Richard C. Schwartz](#)

An accessible introduction to IFS: meeting inner protectors and exiles with curiosity and care.

[Anchored – Deb Dana](#)

Everyday polyvagal practices for building safety, connection, and regulation in real life.

[The Deepest Well – Nadine Burke Harris](#)

The science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and how early stress influences lifelong health—with pathways to recovery.

[Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving – Pete Walker](#)

Practical guidance for survivors of chronic, relational trauma; clear language for triggers, shame, and inner critics.

[The Complex PTSD Workbook – Arielle Schwartz](#)

Step-by-step exercises that translate C-PTSD concepts into daily practice; gentle and highly usable.

[@LiveBeyondTheScore](#)