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## HEALTH NEWS

A- A+

### Not all STDs show obvious symptoms

By Eveline Gan, TODAY | Posted: 27 October 2009 0855 hrs

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It was his first sexual experience with his then-girlfriend. But Eugene (not his real name) ended up getting more than he had expected.

Shortly after, his girlfriend told him she had tested positive for genital warts - something she unknowingly picked up from a former sexual partner. Eugene's subsequent check up revealed that he, too, had contracted the infection.

"I noticed tiny bumps around my genitals, but I didn't think anything was amiss because I felt no discomfort," said the 25-year-old.

Contrary to popular belief, not all sexually-transmitted infections (STI) show obvious or hideous symptoms. Hence, it is possible to contract a STI and not be aware of it, said doctors whom TODAY spoke to.

"Some sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) may be symptomless," said Dr Christopher Chong, a consultant obstetrician, gynaecologist and urogynaecologist at Gleneagles Hospital.

Dr Chong will be speaking on the topic next month as part of the Women's Health Series - a lineup of women's health talks and workshops launched by the Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Singapore in partnership with the People's Association.

According to Dr Chong, more than 10 per cent of men and up to 70 per cent of women with gonorrhoea and Chlamydia - two common types of STI contracted by Singaporeans - may not experience any symptoms or discomfort. Other common STIs in Singapore include syphilis, genital herpes, genital warts and Aids.

Chlamydia Trachomatis, which affects both the mouth and genital areas, is one of the most common STI afflicting women, according to Dr Wee Horng Yen, consultant and director of the Women's Wellness Centre at KK Women's and Children's Hospital.

Because the infection can be a silent one, women may contract Chlamydia from sexual partners who appear healthy, said Dr Wee.

In other cases where symptoms do show up, the problem may simply be due to a lack of awareness. "The patient may be unaware as they do not know the symptoms, and some of these can disappear without treatment. But this does not mean that the person is cured," said Dr Chong.

While it is not unusual for STI victims to feel anger, anxiousness and even depression, a few may also be in a state of disbelief.

"Some are puzzled as to how they could have gotten it, especially if they have a monogamous relationship, and they claim to have been faithful," said Dr Chong.

What they don't realise, warned Dr Wee, is that even one unprotected sexual encounter, as in Eugene's case, may have dire consequences. (STI can cause health complications such as brain and spinal-cord damage, blindness, cervical cancer and infertility.)

For instance, a man with a history of genital herpes can pass the infection to his wife, despite the fact that he has been faithful since marriage, Dr Wee said.

"The man may shed the virus in his semen without him experiencing any symptoms. His wife gets infected, and can get very distressing genital herpes symptoms such as severe genital pain, ulcers and difficulty passing urine," he added.

Condoms, said Dr Wee, can greatly reduce the risk of STI.

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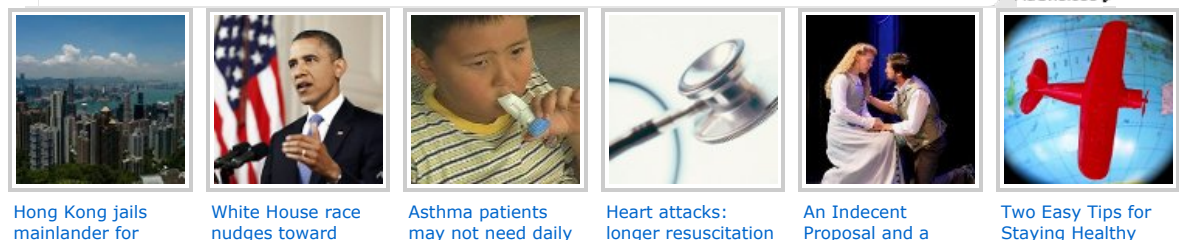
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