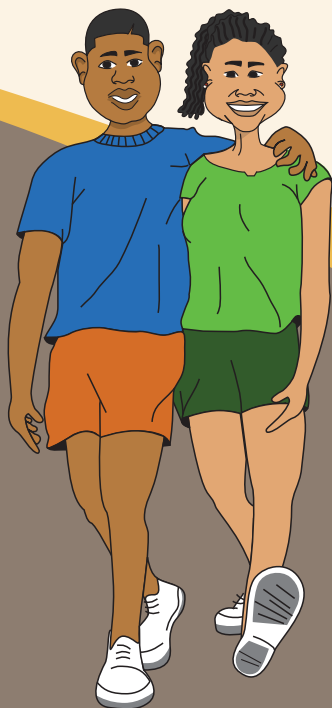


Prevention

Ways to decrease your risk of STDs:

- Don't have sex.
- If you do have sex, use a condom every time.
- Commit to having one sex partner.
- Ask your sex partner if he or she has an STD. Keep in mind: Your partner may not be truthful or may not know that he or she is infected.
- Limit the number of sex partners that you have.
- Learn the symptoms of STDs. Keep in mind: Some STDs do not always have symptoms that you can see. Protect yourself.
- Have regular check-ups that include STD testing.
- Avoid alcohol (beer, liquor) and drugs, which can impair your judgment and lead to unplanned sex. Remember: Even drinking, smoking, and using drugs once in a while can lead to severe sickle cell complications.
- Ask for more facts from sickle cell staff members.



**St. Jude Children's
Research Hospital**

ALSAC • Danny Thomas, Founder
Finding cures. Saving children.

Department of Hematology
262 Danny Thomas Place, Mail Stop 800
Memphis, TN 38105-3678
901-595-5700
www.stjude.org

Produced by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Departments of Hematology, Patient Education, and Biomedical Communications. Funds were provided by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, ALSAC, and a grant from the Plough Foundation.

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician. Our goal is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician. For more general information on sickle cell disease, please visit our Web site at www.stjude.org/sicklecell.

Copyright © 2005 St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Sickle Cell Disease and Sexuality



Sexual Feelings

You might be embarrassed to talk about sex. Even so, thinking about it is a normal part of growing up. No matter how you feel about sex, before you take part in any kind of sexual acts, you need to know about diseases that can be spread during sex and about birth control.

Several diseases can be spread when people have sex. They are called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). These diseases are common in teenagers and young adults. Some teens today are having sex at an early age. They may even have more than one sex partner, and they are not always using protection. For these reasons, STDs are a growing problem in people under the age of 25.

Pregnancy

Teens and young adults with sickle cell disease *can* make and have babies. If you choose to have sex and you do not want to have children, you must use birth control. Both males and females need to think about birth control. The only form of birth control that will prevent both pregnancy and STDs is a condom with a spermicide. A condom looks like a long balloon that is placed over a man's penis. Spermicide is a foam, cream, or jelly, which contains chemicals that kill sperm.

Young men: If you are having sex and your partner becomes pregnant, you are still responsible for the baby. Don't count on your partner to be truthful about whether she is using birth control or whether she has an STD. If she is not sure about having an STD, encourage her to get tested. Protect yourself. Always use a condom with spermicide.

Young women: Don't count on your partner to be truthful about STDs. If he is not sure about whether he has an STD or not, encourage him to get tested. Always protect yourself. Insist that your partner use a condom with a spermicide.

Hydroxyurea

Hydroxyurea is a drug used to help decrease sickle cell pain crises. This drug can cause birth defects.

Whether you are male or female, if you are taking this drug and having sex, you might make a baby that has birth defects.

Not having sex is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and STDs.

Birth Control

If you have sickle cell disease and are having sex, we suggest you use one of these birth control methods if you want to prevent pregnancy:

- Condoms with a spermicide
- Diaphragm and spermicide (a rubber shield that a woman places in her vagina)
- Spermicide used with a condom or diaphragm (placed in the vagina or in a condom)
- Depo-Provera (a hormone shot that a woman gets every 3 months)
- Low-dose birth control pills (hormone pills that a woman must take each day)

Remember: The only method that helps prevent both pregnancy and STDs is a condom with a spermicide. For these to work well, you must use them every time you have sex.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

STDs are diseases that can be passed from one person to another during sexual acts. Keep in mind that your partner may not know that he or she is infected.

A teenager with sickle cell disease already has an increased risk of getting infections. You do not need another disease.

HIV

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) destroys the body's ability to fight off illness. People with HIV are more likely to get serious infections. HIV infection can lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).



AIDS

AIDS is deadly and currently has no cure. Certain drugs can control HIV symptoms in some people. Even so, people with HIV can still get serious infections that can lead to death.

Chlamydia

This is the most common STD. You can get chlamydia if you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has it. You can get it anytime you have sex. This disease has a cure, but it can still have serious long-term side effects if not treated.

Possible symptoms:

- Need to urinate more often
- Burning when urinating
- Unusual discharge from penis or vagina
- For women, pain in abdomen or bleeding between periods or after sex

Sometimes, a person with chlamydia will have no symptoms.

Other STDs

- Genital herpes
- Gonorrhea
- Syphilis
- Genital warts

All of these can be treated. However, some can lead to chronic illness and can be spread to future partners.