Ask the Sexpert

A serodiscordant couple asks our sexpert about the guilt that can come from irrational fears of transmission.

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I’m HIV positive, and my negative boyfriend often jumps into the shower right after sex. It makes me feel dirty. How can I tell him his behavior hurts me while preserving the relationship?

It’s tough for anyone to understand all the conflicting messages our media send about sex and safety. But showering, of course, has nothing to do with preventing transmission and is an inadvertently hurtful act to you emotionally. You both may have underlying, unspoken fears about HIV. You may feel fear and guilt about possibly infecting him and that can affect your self-esteem. He may feel guilty about fearing infection. Or he may just like to clean up quickly after sex. You should start a conversation about your fears and the facts of transmission. He will probably appreciate your candor. Let him know that you understand his concerns about infection. This way, you aren’t picking a fight; you are putting yourself in his shoes. Then you can tell him how he makes you feel when he runs into the shower. Hopefully, you can talk through this so the behavior doesn’t ruin your relationship.

My girlfriend is HIV positive, and after sex, I often can’t relax until I take a shower, even though I know it has nothing to do with reducing the risk of HIV transmission. How can I calm down?

First, ask her how she feels about your shower. She needs to know that you’re the one who feels bad, otherwise the perception may be that you think she is dirty—which is probably not the message you want to send. You probably fear being infected. This can breed a feeling of guilt because you don’t want to hurt her feelings. But she probably has the same concerns, so share them. As for this psychological need, perhaps you should get a more in-depth HIV education. You can do this with her and even talk to her doc. Then, hopefully, you two can more fully enjoy your sex life together.

Logan Levkoff holds an MS degree in Human Sexuality Education and contributes sexual advice for the likes of MTV, *Oprah* and *Cosmopolitan*. Have a question? E-mail sexpert@POZ.com.

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