Cunning Linguist

Neggie boyfriend won't go downtown -- what's a viral Venus to do? Therapist Patrick Califia gives the blow by blow.

June 1, 2002 By Patrick Califia

Dear Sexpert:

I am an HIV positive 28-year-old equally proud of my hard-partying past and my two years of sobriety. Unfortunately, it is tough for a sex-positive grrrrl to find equally radical male companionship. My guy is aware of my status and doesn't moan about using condoms. But he is paranoid about going down on me. I have an irregular menstrual cycle, and on the few occasions I have persuaded him to put his face where it belongs, he complains that he can taste blood. Now, this dude has never turned down one of my excellent blow jobs, by the way. Furthermore, he refuses to get tested. I'm about to tell him to...

-- ...Give Me Liberty or Give Me Head

Dear Headless:

Even straight men can't get away with being pussyphobic these days. Just ask L'il Kim: What's good for the tomcat is good for the kitty. But a dude who doesn't dive headfirst into his girlfriend's glory is often afraid he won't be very good at ringing that little doorbell. If that's the case here, dude's due for a present: Violet Blue's brand-new *The Ultimate Guide to Cunnilingus* (Cleis Press).

But if your boyfriend is truly afraid to get menstrual blood in his mouth, that's reasonable. One recent study found that even when women have undetectable viral loads, there were still measurable amounts of HIV in their reproductive tracts and sexual fluids. The risk of getting the virus from giving head to an HIVer of any gender is one of the Great Mysteries of AIDS. Most practitioners will tell you that it lies this side of negligible, but it is not nonexistent. A few cases of female-to-male transmission during oral sex alone have been documented. So your boyfriend has a right to protect himself.

And so do you -- from other STDs -- which is why your man's mule-headedness about not getting tested has to stop. Put your foot down and your knees together. His attitude sends a message that you're the one who is dirty and dangerous, while he is above reproach. A positive person does not need to invite such demoralizing snottiness into bed -- it's already too easy to feel erotically jinxed. What's he afraid of, anyway? If your Big-Baloney Driver knows what distinguishes a mediocre blow job from a truly stellar performance, he's checked into the No-Tell Motel often

enough to justify a tête-à-tête with a hematologist. While there, he can get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.

Remind the great withholder of mustache rides that if he thinks he sees red, he doesn't literally have to stick his tongue into your vagina. If he concentrates on licking your clit, he won't ingest much lubrication. For added safety, a tampon can help keep your wet, salty goodness inside. If you prefer penetration, he can snap on a glove or use a dildo. A sore throat, bleeding gums or the influence of drugs or drink could make him more susceptible to infection.

Finally, there is the option of using a viral barrier: dental dams, Glyde's Lollyes, even Saran Wrap. Squares of latex originally used in oral surgery, dams are, sadly, thicker than condoms. Lollyes are much thinner and transmit more sensation. Plastic food wrap is cheap, see-through and usable by the yard if you so desire. Good Vibrations (www.goodvibes.com) markets thin latex shorts -- safer-sex fetish wear. J.T.'s Stockroom (www.stockroom.com) has a harness of thin leather straps made to hold a dental dam or Lollye, so your hands are free for other mischief. A Canadian company markets a garter belt for the same purpose (www.womynsware.com). In a pinch, you can cut up a condom or a latex glove.

The first time you cover up your cunt for cunnilingus, it might take you a while to figure out how to come. Allow yourselves time to acquire a new sexual skill -- your partner will also need to adjust his technique. But the more often you associate this precaution with pleasure, the better your response. A little dab of lube between you and the barrier will do ya.

After proposing all this, if your man still won't go diving for pearls, it's time for a talk. Maybe there's some deep, dark reason that he's withholding his wanton tongue. Is there some thrill he wants that you have ixnayed? Has he had traumatic experiences with cunnilingus? Or is he afraid to get too close, lest you become even more important than you already are, and then either break up with him or die? Sadly, I've seen many couples in my office who have drawn apart out of a fear of needing each other and suffering an unbearable loss. You may need a pro to help you out. A word to the wise: Saran Wrap is much cheaper than couple counseling.

At a loss in love or lust? Ask the POZ *Sexpert, 1 Little W. 12th St., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10014, or e-mail sexpert@poz.com.*

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