Playing It Safe And Sexy

October 1, 2003 By Derek Thaczuk

While the big National HIV Prevention Conference in July sounded the alarm over last year's 7.1 percent rise in new gay HIV cases, a recent University of California, San Diego study accentuated the positive—387 positive gay men, that is. UCSD researchers found that one-on-one behavioral counseling reduced HIVers' risky rides with neg or unknown-status partners by 71 percent. "Safer sex is a social skill," says Jim Zians of the university's Edge Research Project. "We want to help people bring health into their social world." Busting out of the generic use-a-condom-every-time box, the shrink sessions role-played HIV disclosure and condom negotiation (two distinct processes, Zians says) while helping guys eroticize safe sex. "We use a list of foreplay things that don't involve penetration—strip poker, licking testicles, toe sucking—if you don't have a condom," Zians says. Helping HIVers keep their partners negative benefits everyone, says Columbia University psychologist Robert Remien. "We must involve HIVers in prevention efforts for their own well-being and that of the whole community, treating them as a whole person, with a need for sex and intimacy."

Zians' 5 tips for saying "I'm positive":

1. KEEP IT PERSONAL: Try "I like to be up-front about things…."
2. **DON'T APOLOGIZE:** Be honest—but not sorry—for having HIV.
3. **DO DESIRE:** Stress how attractive you find your partner. It's about sex!
4. **KEEP IT UP:** Stay, er, positive. Save your seroconversion story for later.
5. **YOU COME FIRST:** Safer sex protects your health, not just your partner's.

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