Sex RX

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One of the cruel realities in poor countries with skyrocketing HIV rates is that HAART's unavailability denies people with HIV not only life-extending treatment, but also the lower viral loads known to make the transmission of HIV less likely. Inexpensive methods of reducing that risk are urgently needed, and the conference offered some hopeful news. Researchers from the University of Washington and the University of Nairobi (Kenya) reported a deficiency of selenium (an anti-oxidant mineral) is not only common in HIVers, but associated with a threefold increase in the shedding of HIV infected cells in the vagina. Senior researcher J. Baeten, MD, suggested further investigation into whether pennies-a-day doses of selenium might help reduce transmission.

In another study by the two schools, treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) resulted in decreased cervical inflammation and shredding of HIV. The researchers emphasized the importance into comprehensive approaches to reducing HIV transmission.

Several studies that were performed in Africa—where male circumcision rates vary by culture—showed that a forsaken foreskin may, er, cut your risk of HIV infection, probably because the snipping causes changes in the tissue of the penis head that lessen the vulnerability to STDs, including HIV. Although the benefits of reduced transmission must be weighed against circumcision's costs and complications (such as surgical infections, ongoing pain, and—sorry!—decreased sensitivity), researchers estimate that circumcision before puberty (and sexual activity) might prevent almost half (45 percent) of the world's cases of sexually transmitted HIV.

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