Ask the Sexperts - Fall 2005

Monique Brown McKenzie gets answers to questions you won't ask in public.

September 2, 2005 By Monique Brown McKenzie

When some women see I'm uncircumcised, they think I'm not as "clean" or that they're going to catch something from me. Are they right?

—Natural Man

The risks of a woman contracting a sexually transmitted disease are the same whether her partner is circumcised or not, says Ira Sharlip, MD, a spokesman for the American Urological Association. As for cleanliness, "Most men are proud of their penises and take good care of them," says Lionel B. Fraser Jr., MD, of Metropolitan Urology in Jackson, Mississippi. And since 1971, the American Academy of Pediatrics has said there is no medical reason for circumcision. "Circumcision represents a personal preference or religious decision," Fraser says. However, a recent South African study of 3,000 men found circumcised men were 70 percent less likely than uncircumcised men to contract HIV. Be safe and use condoms.

I heard that a sister had a heart attack using the contraceptive patch. I've been thinking about it as a birth control option. What do I need to know?

—Over the Pill

The Ortho Evra contraceptive patch—"the patch"—has been linked to 17 deaths since its release in 2002, including that of Zakiya Kennedy, an 18-year-old African- American college student. Patch wearers are at slightly higher risk than pill takers for strokes and heart attacks. However, these risks are low overall for users of both types of hormones, says ob/gyn Jo'Ann Jackson, MD, at WomenCare in Alexandria, Virginia. Her patients like the patch's convenience, although a few complain of minor skin irritation. Still, Dr. Jackson warns: "Women on the pill or patch should not smoke because that increases the risk of blood clot or stroke and makes high blood pressure problems worse." She notes that the patch doesn't work quite as well in women who weigh over 200 pounds. And remember: the patch doesn't protect against STDs, so condoms are still a must.

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