

Molly's Story

Be Smart. Be Well. STD Videos

[Announcer] This podcast is presented the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Molly] I was sort of a good girl. I never anticipated contracting an STD. That was the furthest thing from my mind.

[Dr. Jill Grimes] One in five Americans over the age of 12 have genital herpes. And so, as you can see, these diseases are incredibly common.

[Molly] I have genital herpes, which I contracted when I was 23 years old. My symptoms were an incredible burning sensation, especially when I urinated. And so I went immediately to the doctor.

[Dr. Jill Grimes] We have this misperception that STDs belong to this fringe of society. But the reality is, we treat everyone. It crosses racial barriers, educational barriers, and certainly economic differences.

[Molly] I thought that my life was basically over, that I would never get married and live with someone and have children. I mean, there were so many misconceptions. I felt shunned, in a way, by people who didn't understand what it was.

[Dr. Jill Grimes] So, Molly, I'm sure you have a lot of questions about...

[Dr. Jill Grimes] When I counsel my patients about how to be sexually responsible, the first thing, of course, is for them just to have a basic knowledge of diseases. If you have had a new sexual partner, then it is time to be tested. And that is true whether or not you practice safe sex, using a condom, because some diseases, such as herpes, are spread outside of condoms. You don't wait until you have a symptom to be tested. So, the biggest thing is to be tested before you're intimate with somebody and to have open conversations about that.

[Molly] Telling potential sexual partners about my herpes, I am ridiculously honest. After a certain point, I will let them know that, in fact, I have herpes. I've had only one man make the choice not to be intimate with me.

[Dr. Jill Grimes] As you know, we cannot make it go away completely. We can make each outbreak go away more quickly and hurt less. And you'll identify triggers within your own life that seem to make it worse.

[Molly] I have realized that stress and emotions have a great deal to do with my herpes. I do things to keep myself emotionally calm and to keep my stress at a minimum. I had many outbreaks of herpes in the first few years, and now they're very few and far between.

[Dr. Jill Grimes] An STD, just like any other disease, should never define you. You are not herpes. You are a person who happens to also have herpes.

[Molly] The shift from being so devastated, originally, about my diagnosis of herpes to the happiness I feel now about my life, developed slowly over time. And as I became more educated, I was able to educate others. My advice to people who are living with herpes would be to realize that although the word "incurable" is used with this disease, it is definitely manageable.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24-7.