

STI Attitude and Belief Scale

Purpose:

The following quiz will help you evaluate whether your beliefs and attitudes about STIs lead you to take risks that may heighten your risk for contracting an STI.

Directions:

Indicate that you believe the following items are true or false by circling the T or the F: Then consult the answer key that follows.

- T F 1. You can usually tell whether someone is infected with an STI, especially HIV infection.
- T F 2. Chances are that if you haven't caught an STI by now, you probably have a natural immunity and won't get infected in the future.
- T F 3. A person who is successfully treated for an STI needn't worry about getting it again.
- T F 4. So long as you keep yourself fit and healthy, you needn't worry about STIs.
- T F 5. The best way for sexually active people to protect themselves from STIs is to practice safer sex.
- T F 6. The only way to catch an STI is to have sex with someone who has one.
- T F 7. Talking about STIs with a partner is so embarrassing that you're best off not raising the subject and hope the other person will.
- T F 8. STIs are mostly a problem for people who are promiscuous.
- T F 9. You don't need to worry about contracting an STI so long as you wash yourself thoroughly with soap and hot water immediately after sex.
- T F 10. You don't need to worry about AIDS if no one you know has ever come down with it.
- T F 11. When it comes to STIs, it's all in the cards. Either you're lucky or you're not.
- T F 12. The time to worry about STIs is when you come down with one.
- T F 13. As long as you avoid risky sexual practices, such as anal intercourse, you're pretty safe from STIs.
- T F 14. The time to talk about safer sex is before any sexual contact occurs.
- T F 15. A person needn't be concerned about an STI if the symptoms clear up on their own in a few weeks.

Scoring:

1. **False.** While some STIs have telltale signs, such as the appearance of sores or blisters on the genitals or disagreeable genital odors, others do not. Several STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea (especially in women), internal genital warts, and even HIV infection in its early stages, cause few if any obvious signs or symptoms. You often cannot tell whether your partner is infected with an STI. Many of the nicest looking and well-groomed people carry STIs, often unknowingly. The only way to know whether a person is infected with HIV is by means of an HIV-antibody test.

2. **False.** If you practice unprotected sex and have not contracted an STI to this point, count your blessings. The thing about good luck is that it eventually runs out.
3. **False.** Sorry. Successful treatment does not render immunity against reinfection. You still need to take precautions to avoid reinfection, even if you have had an STI in the past and were successfully treated. If you answered true to this item, you're not alone. About one in five college students polled in a recent survey of more than 5,500 college students across Canada believed that a person who gets an STI cannot get it again.
4. **False.** Even people in prime physical condition can be felled by the tiniest of microbes that cause STIs. Physical fitness is no protection against these microscopic invaders.
5. **True.** If you are sexually active, practicing safer sex is the best protection against contracting an STI.
6. **False.** STIs can also be transmitted through nonsexual means, such as by sharing contaminated needles or, in some cases, through contact with disease-causing organisms on towels and bed sheets or even toilet seats.
7. **False.** Because of the social stigma attached to STIs, it's understandable that you may feel embarrassed raising the subject with your partner. But don't let embarrassment prevent you from taking steps to protect your own and your partner's welfare.
8. **False.** While it stands to reason that people who are sexually active with numerous partners stand a greater chance that one of their sexual partners carries an STI, all it takes is one infected partner to pass along an STI to you, even if he or she is the only partner you've had or even if the two of you only had sex once. STIs are a potential problem for anyone who is sexually active.
9. **False.** While washing your genitals immediately after sex may have some limited protective value, it is no substitute for practicing safer sex.
10. **False.** You can never know whether you may be the first among your friends and acquaintances to become infected. Moreover, symptoms of HIV infection may not appear for years after initial infection with the virus, so you may have sexual contacts with people who are infected but don't know it and who are capable of passing along the virus to you. You in turn may then pass it along to others, whether or not you are aware of any symptoms.
11. **False.** Nonsense. While luck may play a part in determining whether you have a sexual contact with an infected partner, you can significantly reduce your risk of contracting an STI.
12. **False.** The time to start thinking about STIs (thinking helps, but worrying only makes you more anxious than you need be) is now, not after you have contracted an infection. Some STIs, like herpes and AIDS, cannot be cured. The only real protection you have against them is prevention.
13. **False.** Any sexual contact between the genitals, or between the genitals and the anus, or between the mouth and genitals, is risky if one of the partners is infected with an STI.
14. **True.** Unfortunately, too many couples wait until they have commenced sexual relations to have "a talk." By then it may already be too late to prevent the transmission of an STI. The time to talk is before any intimate sexual contact occurs.
15. **False.** Several STIs, notably syphilis, HIV infection, and herpes, may produce initial symptoms that clear up in a few weeks. But while the early symptoms may subside, the infection is still at work within the body and requires medical attention. Also, as noted previously, the infected person is capable of passing along the infection to others, regardless of whether noticeable symptoms were ever present.

Interpreting Your Score

First, add up the number of items you got right. The higher your score, the lower your risk. The lower your score, the greater your risk. A score of 13 correct or better may indicate that your attitudes toward STIs would probably decrease your risk of contracting them. Yet even one wrong response on this test may increase your risk of contracting an STI. You should also recognize that attitudes have little effect on behavior unless they are carried into action. Knowledge alone isn't sufficient to protect yourself from STIs. You need to ask yourself how you are going to put knowledge into action by changing your behavior to reduce your chances of contracting an STI.