WILL THERE EVER BE A CURE?

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN HERPES & AIDS?

WHAT SHOULD MOTHERS-TO-BE KNOW ABOUT HERPES?

CAN A PERSON HAVE HERPES & NOT KNOW IT?

IS SEXUAL FIDELITY THE ANSWER?

ARE HOMOSEXUALS AT GREATER RISK?

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THE TRUTH ABOUT HERPES

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The publishers wish to express their gratitude to Astra Pharmaceuticals Canada Ltd
Astra Pharmaceutiques Canada Ltée
for an education grant which helped to make this publication possible.

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Sacks, Stephen L., 1948–
The truth about herpes

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-919959-02-4

1. Herpes simplex. I. Title.

RC147.H6S22 1983 616.9'518 C83-098959-5

Published by Grosvenor House Press, Inc.
Toronto/Montreal

Printed in Canada
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Drs. Stewart Millward and Angus F. Graham for introducing me to the laboratory study of viruses and to Dr. Thomas C. Merigan, Jr. for introducing me to the clinical study of viral illnesses and to the laboratory and clinical study of drugs which combat those illnesses. David Rollins, Shabe Lohrasbe, Rebecca Fox, Robert Gibbins, Paul Levendusky and Thomas Perry, Jr. offered careful critical evaluations of the evolving chapters. Joyce Diggins and Susan Rayner expertly prepared the typescript. Ms. K. Wong and Dr. D. McLean supplied the electron micrograph. Marika Sacks served as editor, research assistant, and friend.

The U.B.C. Herpes Clinic owes its existence to P. Lynn Buhler, Rebecca Fox and Paul Levendusky. They have given their expertise and their personal energies in establishing the clinic as an efficient but compassionate operation. The clinic also owes a debt to Laurel Lemchuk-Favel for her role in the herpes diagnostic laboratory and to Dr. Lawrence Corey who offered advice at the outset concerning the needs of a special clinic for people with herpes.

Most of all, I thank my patients who have given their blood, their pictures and their cultures for my teaching and research. They have given me the reasons to teach about herpes and to seek new methods for treatment. They have shared with me their secrets, their pains, their joy and their thanks.
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INTRODUCTION

If I have herpes, does that make me a sexual leper? Is herpes a sign of the Apocalypse? Is it the wrath of God? A modern day plague? Will I be able to have children if I get it? Will it give me cancer? Is it incurable? Should I become celibate? Should I see a divorce lawyer? Will I go blind? Is this the incurable social disease which deforms babies and causes cancer? These concerns, and many more, are very real ones for the thousands of people whose lives are touched by herpes. The questions are numerous, and they keep coming. Answers are essential.

At the University of British Columbia Herpes Clinic, one of only a handful of its kind in North America, we have seen hundreds of genital herpes sufferers. We have listened carefully to thousands of questions, and done our best to answer them with facts. A glance at the table of contents will give you an idea of what people are asking. The answers are based on current medical knowledge and day-by-day clinical experience.

There is no question that herpes is a growing problem. The number of people affected is increasing at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, misinformation has increased with the growth rate. We do not know just how many people are affected with herpes, but guesses of 500,000 to 1,000,000 new cases in North America per year have been made. These figures are generally based on the number of herpes sufferers who go to clinics which treat sexually transmitted diseases. However, all people with herpes do not necessarily go to such clinics. Family doctors, as well as specialists in dermatology, urology, gynecology, or infectious diseases, are diagnosing and treating herpes. Furthermore, because herpes is not always diagnosed with a standard lab test and because it is not, for physicians, a “notifiable” disease like syphilis or tuberculosis, there are no dependable statistics. During the last decade the number of people seeking medical attention for this problem has increased nearly tenfold. Along with the rise in incidence of genital herpes, there has been a parallel upswing in media attention. Some have suggested that the problem has grown more in print than in victims. While there is an element of
truth in this, herpes remains all too real to the person who has it. It is a serious concern to anyone who is or who plans to be sexually active in their life, whether those plans include one lifetime partner or a hundred. Coping with and living a normal life around herpes is a challenge which can be met. To meet the challenge, however, you have to arm yourself with the truth. Unfortunately, the dissemination of useful information has not always been the goal in the current media obsession with the disease. For television and the newspapers, herpes has become a major "news" event—from public affairs shows to the eleven o’clock news, from glossy magazines to hardcore newsmagazines. Such unrelenting public exposure to the problem has actually changed the disease itself. Herpes is no longer just a sexually transmitted infection which requires understanding—it has become a stigma which requires destigmatizing. We are subjected to flashy headlines and frightening stories; home remedies and personal tragedies. Herpes has good selling power but all too often, unfortunately, fear is transmitted in lieu of information.

Television, magazines, and even books wholly devoted to herpes have only rarely dealt with the subject with care. Whether it is the personal anecdotes told at cocktail parties or summarized in seventy printed words next to an ad for perfume, the issues surrounding this common infection have all too often been dealt with in a haphazard fashion. Even the medical profession has had a tough job of it. The time required to inform the patient fully about the problem, explain the details, and answer the questions is not always available in the doctor’s office.

Several good organizations have been formed to help provide reliable information about herpes, but unless you’re aware that they exist, they can’t be of any help. Most of what’s in print about herpes avoids the difficult questions, talking about the subject in a superficial way. This book is different. It will take you step by step through the plain facts. Your fears surrounding herpes will be honestly met—nothing, pleasant or unpleasant, is glossed over. Yet the truth has a way of placing fears into perspective. If you are reading this book to learn whether you have herpes—read on. It is important that you do find out, and this book will tell you how to do
just that. If you are reading it to find a method for prevention—read on. You may not find a simple answer to the question, but you will know enough to approach prevention intelligently. If you are a physician, you will find the book useful as a tool to help your patients cope with their herpes. It will show you what each person with herpes needs to know in order to live with it.

It is my hope that each person reading this book will realize that herpes is everyone’s problem and everyone’s concern. Whether you think you have herpes or think that you don’t, you should be armed with the truth when you joke about herpes at a party or when you begin your next intimate relationship. You should know the facts before deciding you have never had or never will have this problem. You should know more than you do now before you agree or disagree that herpes may be “the wrath of God.” You must learn more before you decide “it will never happen to me.”

This book will give you new insight into a growing problem. It is my hope that the misconceptions which result from ignorance will cease to be the single, most important problem about herpes.