



Chlamydia and Health

Every person has their own ideas about what health is, and what makes them healthy. Someone with the 'flu' might have to skip school, Uni, work, sport, or a party and might consider themselves sick. Feeling stressed or depressed about stuff going on in life can also affect how healthy a person feels. Other people regard health as something that is more about well-being – feeling positive about life and in control regardless of whether there is a physical complaint. Having good relationships with family and friends or having a strong sense of spirituality can make someone feel healthy. For many, being healthy is about taking care of the body, mind and spirit. This might include learning to live with chronic health problems or preventing new health problems from occurring. There is no right or wrong way to define health for yourself – it's a very personal thing and it changes over time.

Chlamydia infection is an interesting issue to consider when it comes to health. Most people with Chlamydia don't have symptoms and might feel perfectly healthy. In fact, the only way that they might discover they have it is if they accidentally give their infection to a sexual partner through unprotected sex. Alternatively, it might be diagnosed much later if some of the complications of Chlamydia infection occur. If a person with Chlamydia does get symptoms they might feel quite unwell, and for a while they might not feel like having sex or getting intimate. These relationship issues and longer term consequences might affect how a person sees their health.

Chlamydia and stigma

Did you know that Wikipedia has 20 meanings for the word stigma?

What we mean by stigma is "social disapproval". Stigma is a weird thing. As recently as 50 or 60 years ago in a country like Australia some in society disapproved of women going to work after they were married instead of looking after their husbands and kids full time. It's difficult to imagine that being the case these days. Another example is racism – where one group shows disapproval of another group because of their race.

Sex is an issue that can generate lots of stigma. People often have very strong opinions about whether young, or old, people should have sex, whether sex with someone of the same sex is OK, and whether having a sexually transmitted infection says something 'bad' about a person. Think about whether the word 'slut' for example. Does it suggest strong disapproval about the person who is called a slut? What about a word like 'gay'? Do you know anyone who has been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection? How did you or others react to that? Since a person can catch an infection such as Chlamydia without knowing, does it really say anything about their sex life or about their beliefs and values?

Research suggests that people might not talk to a health professional about sexually transmitted infections because they worry about stigma. Health professionals are legally bound to keep information confidential. A person should be able to trust that the health professional they see will show them respect and be non-judgemental. Advising someone about dangers to their health (such as smoking or unprotected sex) is not the same as being judgemental. See Getting a Chlamydia test for more information.