



## Discussion Guide

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### An STD's Tale: Luke

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*Here's the tale of a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Can you guess which STD it is? Read on, guess, and check your answer at the end.*

I remember the night I first met Luke. I don't think he knew it then, since his partner didn't know it either, but I certainly knew. It was really too bad, since he was having such a good time that he entirely forgot about using protection during sex.

But a virus has to make a "living" somehow, so I made myself at home in Luke's body. I went straight for the base of his spine, in a bundle of nerves, and started setting up, just hanging around.

After a few days, I decided to get to work for the first time. I went along the nerves reaching out from his spine and went to the surface of the skin around his genitals to do my work.

What is my work? I multiply. That's it. My job is to multiply quickly and efficiently, and I did. It was my first day and I wanted to make a good impression. I didn't want to come on too fast or give it away that I was already living in his body, so I decided to not cause any symptoms during the first few weeks after I infected him.

A few weeks later, Luke noticed that the skin on his penis and scrotum was getting red and irritated and feeling a little tingly. What he didn't notice were a few sores I produced on the back of his scrotum and base of his penis. I like to be sneaky and make those blister-like sores come out in places that can be hard to see.



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I was especially grateful when Luke took another partner while he still didn't know he had me in him. Since the sores on his genitals were still healing, Luke gave it to his partner during oral sex, because who even thinks to use a condom during oral sex? I'm happy to know that there are little copies of myself being passed around his school, but my first priority will always be my host.

It was right around finals time when Luke began to suspect something. He was really stressed out. I felt bad, but I gotta survive, right? The redness and tingly skin happened again, just like the last time. I worked overtime to give him more fluid-filled blisters along the shaft of his penis. He was really worried when they were raw and tender to the touch.

Luke was in so much pain and so embarrassed that he tried to keep it private. He never even got it checked out by a doctor, but instead applied over-the-counter cream. But I was too much for him. When the little scabs healed, I went back to sleep in his spine.

I awoke again a while ago, because Luke was at the beach and out in the sun a lot. If he was going to have a good time getting a suntan, so was I. I just love the sun! I even infected his urethra this time, which gives him a burning sensation when he urinates. That's what finally clued him in to the idea that something might be really wrong.

So, he went to a clinic and got it all checked out anonymously. I was quite worried about the results, but I was as relieved as Luke was horrified when the doctor told us there is no cure. There's no way to get rid of me permanently.

The doctor did give Luke treatment to prevent me from waking up and giving him more lesions and sores, not to mention burning and tingling sensations. But the medicine can't kill me, and I might wake up every so often, ready for my next active shift. I don't think he's very pleased about having me around, but an STD's gotta do what an STD's gotta do.

Luke has begun to take measures in using protection, and he's also told his partners about me, so there's very little chance of me getting passed on to



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anyone else. I'm a bit hurt by the news, but I'm dealing with it by dozing off most of the time. I don't think I'm going to wake up for a while.

That's the great part about being an STD like me. I can be dormant for weeks, months, even years at a time, but my host will always know I'm there. I could pop up any time, especially during times of stress or exposure to the sun.

Even when I sleep, I'm always duplicating, and Luke could "shed" copies of me on to other people through intimate contact. I take comfort in the knowledge that there are little versions of me running around in Luke's two unprotected partners, not to mention in Luke himself.

Who knows? Maybe one night he'll slip up, forget to use protection (like the first night we met), and I'll infect someone else. Until then, I'll be dozing and waiting for my next shift of activity.

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