Navigating safe sex with a new partner.

The emergence of HIV/AIDS and the increase in other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) have transformed the issue of disclosing and discussing sexual histories with a potential intimate partner. What was once an extremely embarrassing discussion is now a matter of personal health.

Admittedly, it's not easy to raise the subject, but it is absolutely essential whenever a relationship is likely to include sex. There are ways to approach the subject. With someone you've only recently met, it's perfectly okay to say, "I'm sorry but until we know each other better and feel comfortable talking about sex, we just can't get involved sexually. There's too much at stake." If a person tries to pursue sexual intimacies without revealing his or her sexual history, he or she doesn't have your best interests at heart. Your life and health aren't worth the risk.

Honest discussion isn't a matter of prying; they're no reason to name names or give the intimate details of other relationships. The purpose is to disclose everything that can affect a partner's health and life. Both people should be willing to have blood tests and medical checkups and to exchange the results. People have been known to lie about test results, so a literal exchange of records is reasonable.

Both partners are both responsible for condom use, and each partner has the right to insist that condoms are worn. Someone should never hesitate to provide condoms if their partner is unprepared.