
Let's Talk About Sex:

A Practical Approach to STIs in Older Adults

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Geriatrics Grand Rounds

June 12, 2024

Eleanor Roosevelt

“Do one thing everyday that scares you. Those small things that make us uncomfortable help us build courage to do the work we do.”



Objectives

1. Describe the epidemiology of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) within older adult patient population
2. Differentiate presentations and management of STIs in older adults from other age-groups
3. Recognize ageist mechanisms that pose barriers to discussions of sexual practices
4. Develop a confident approach to sexual health history-taking for an older adult patient

Case Presentation

• **6 months prior**

Groin pain

• **1 month prior**

Increasing pain

• **3 months prior**

Fatigue, arthralgias,
penile ulcer

• **Time of
Presentation**

Debilitating pain



Representative Image from Consultant 360



In the back of your mind:

What might we have been done differently?

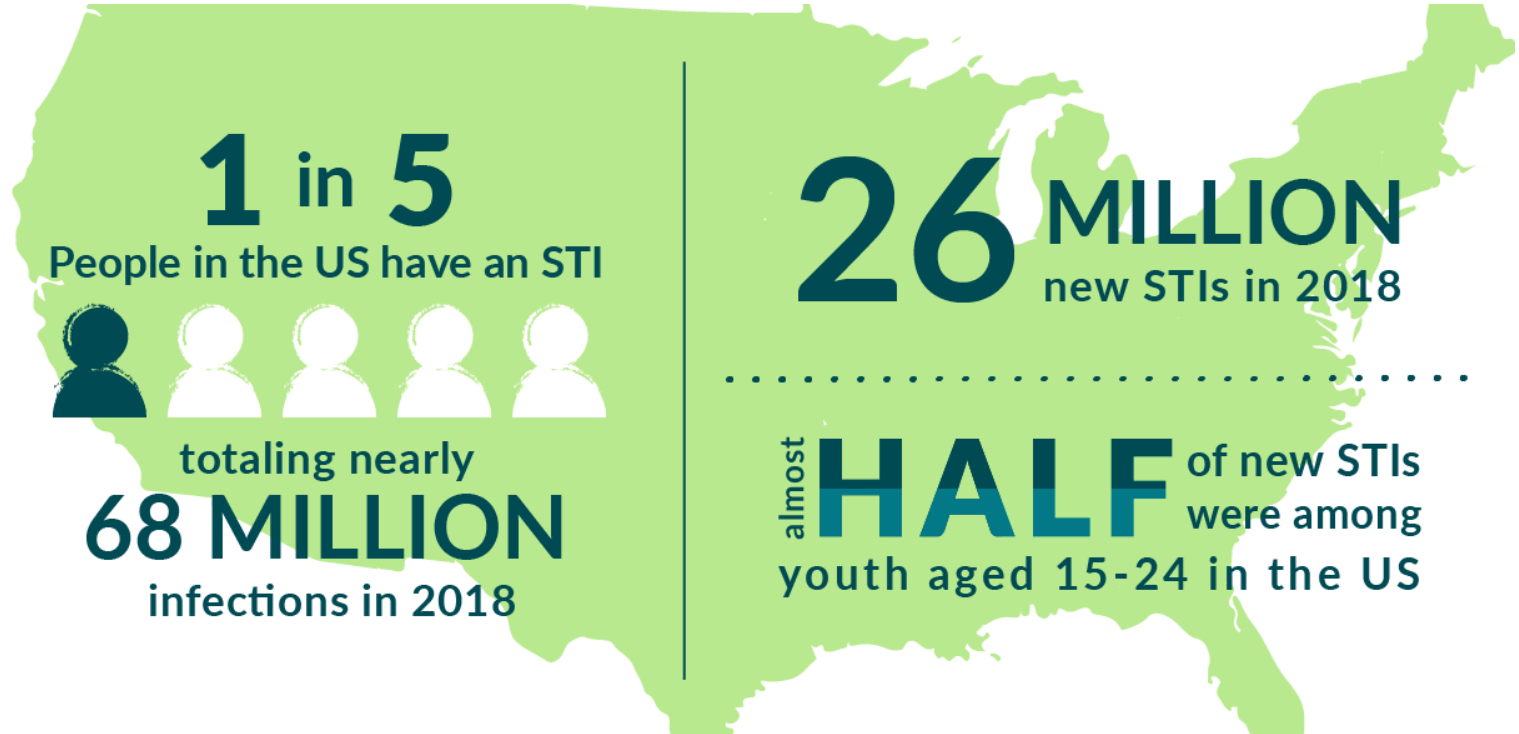
What factors make this case difficult?

What was done well in this case?

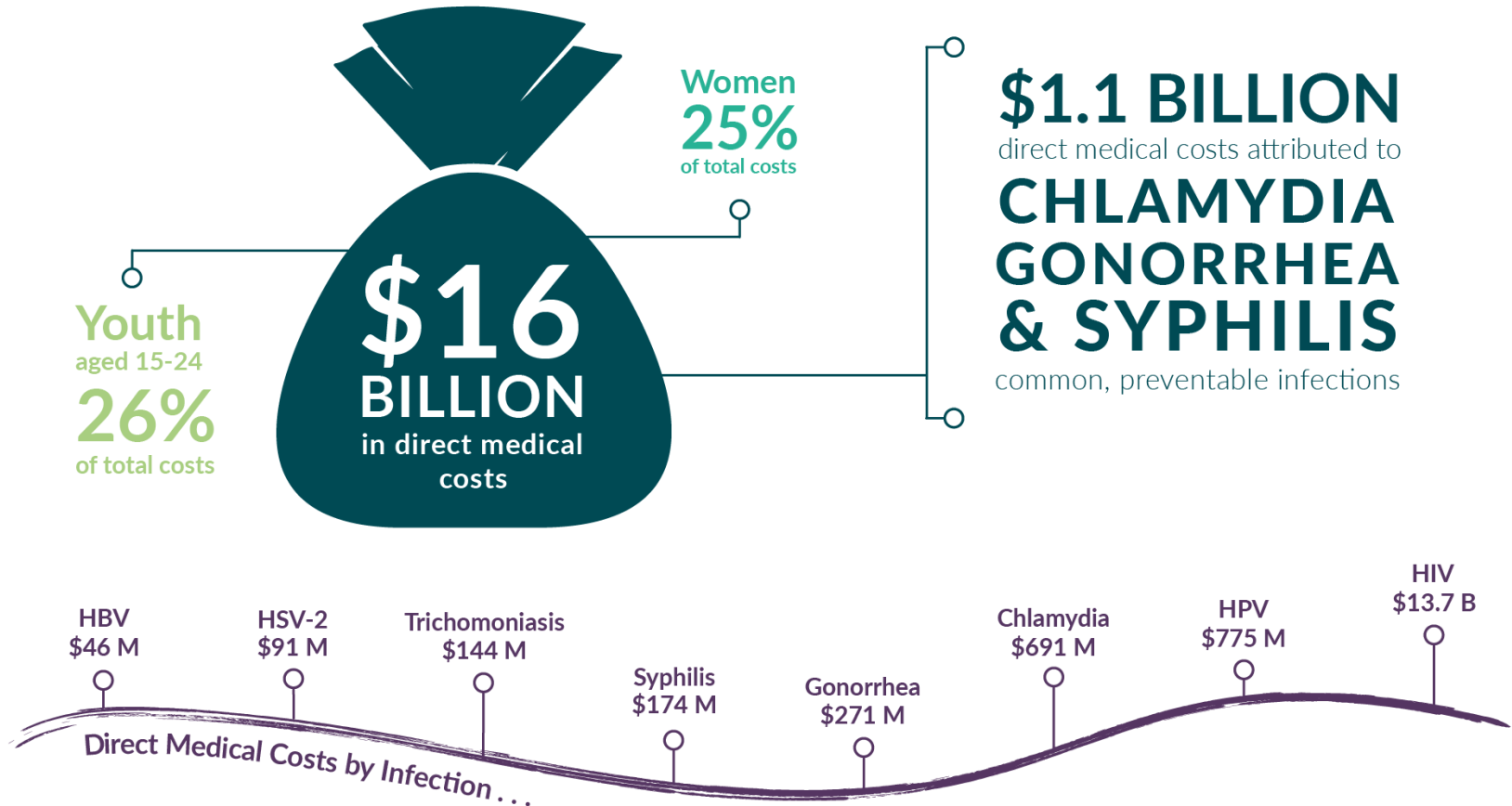
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Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in the US



STIs cost the US healthcare system.



Disparities in STDs persist among racial & ethnic minority groups

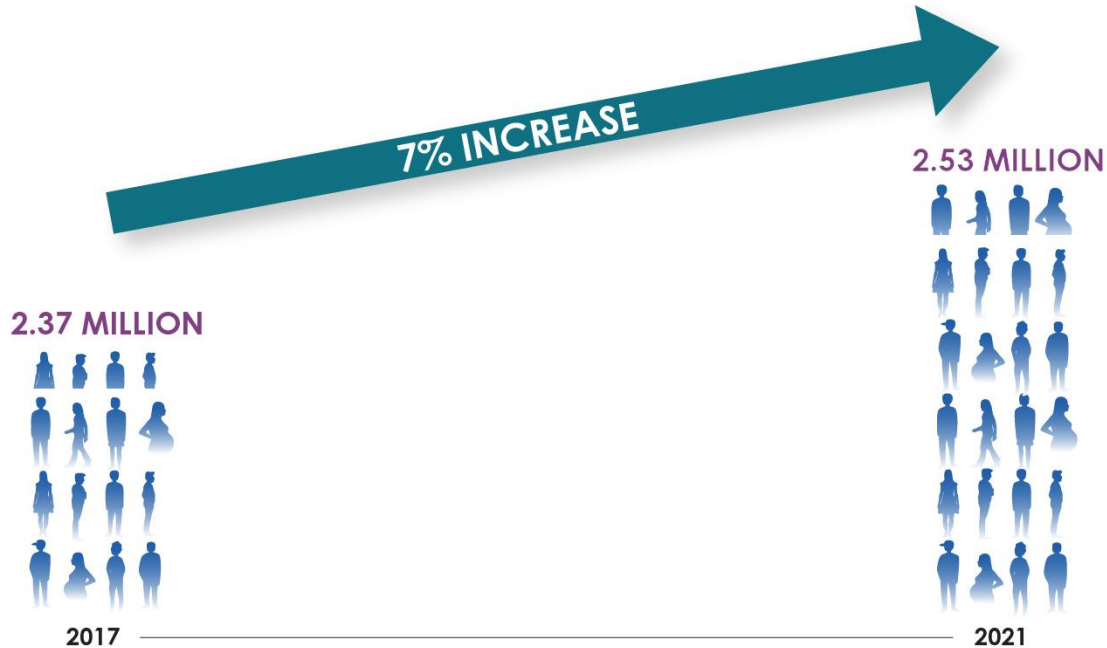
While STDs are increasing across many groups,
2019 STD RATES WERE:



For more information visit www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom

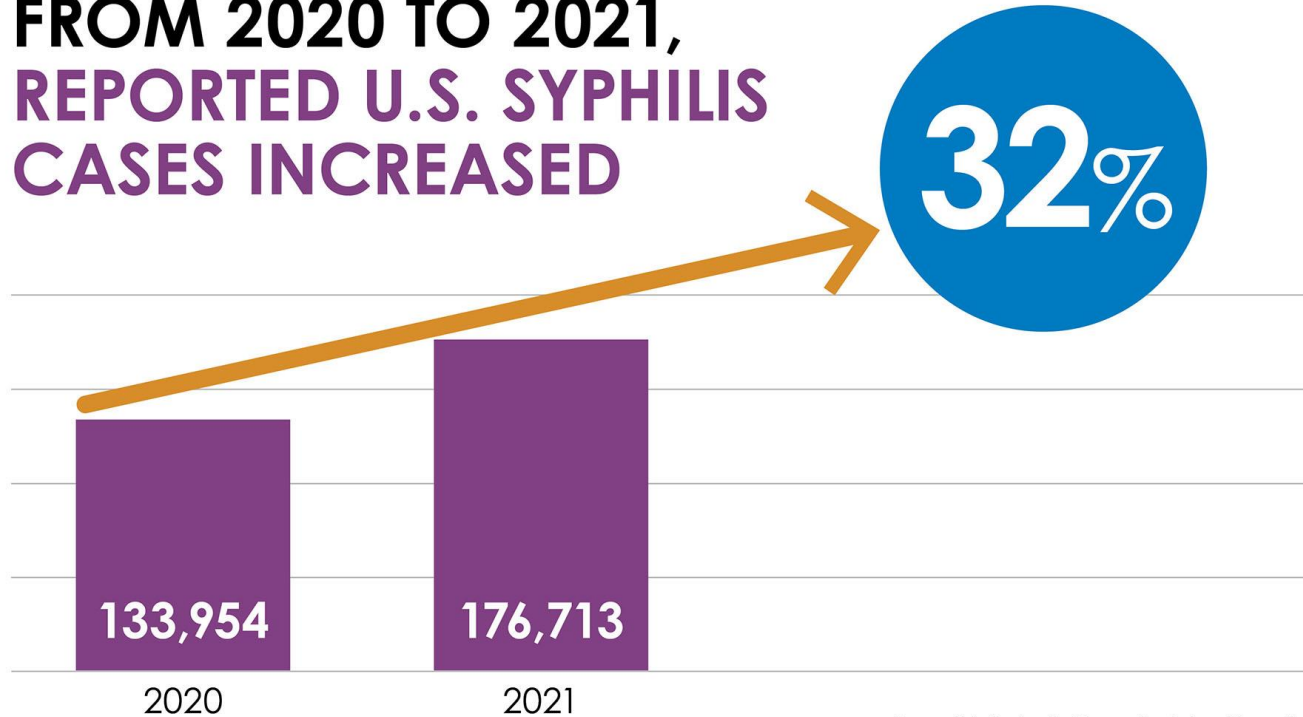
STIs are on the rise in older adults.

FROM 2017 TO 2021, OVERALL REPORTED STDS INCREASED 7%



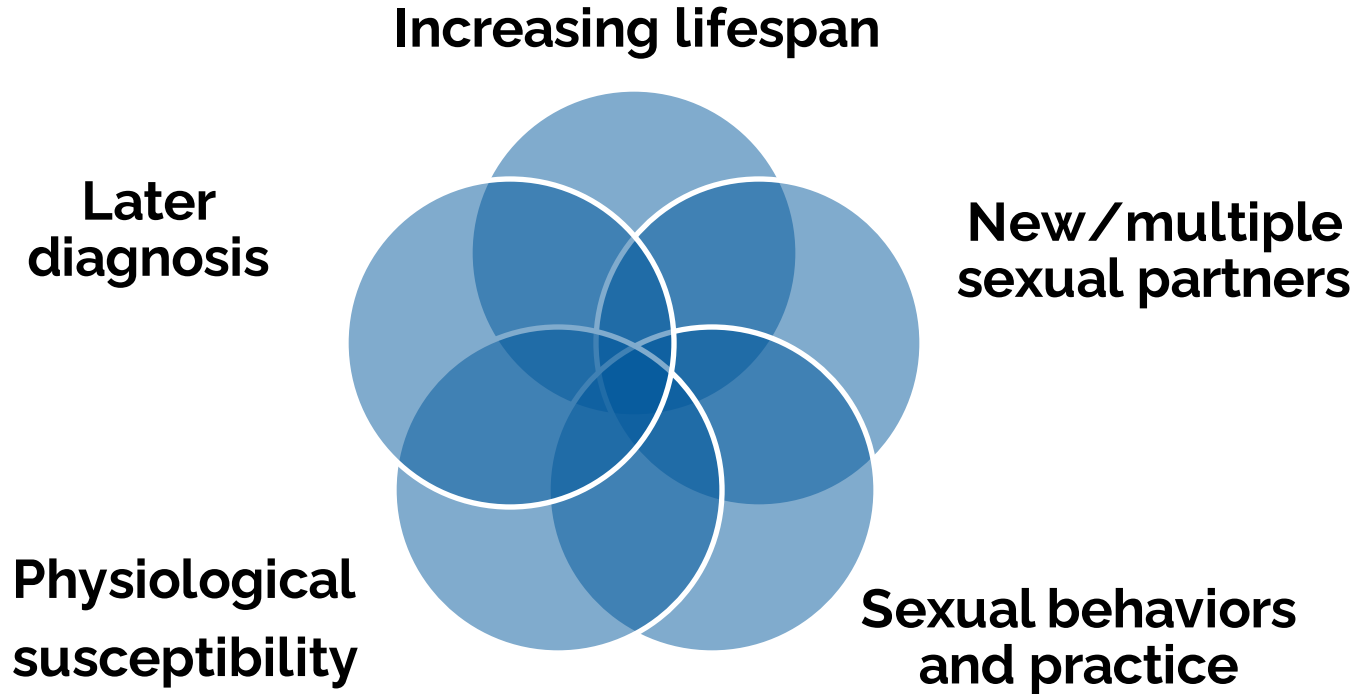
STIs are on the rise in older adults.

**FROM 2020 TO 2021,
REPORTED U.S. SYPHILIS
CASES INCREASED**



Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Factors contributing to STI transmission in OAs



STIs affect OA health.

**Delay in
diagnosis**

**Untreated
complications**

**Mental
health**

Embarrassment

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Common STIs in older adults

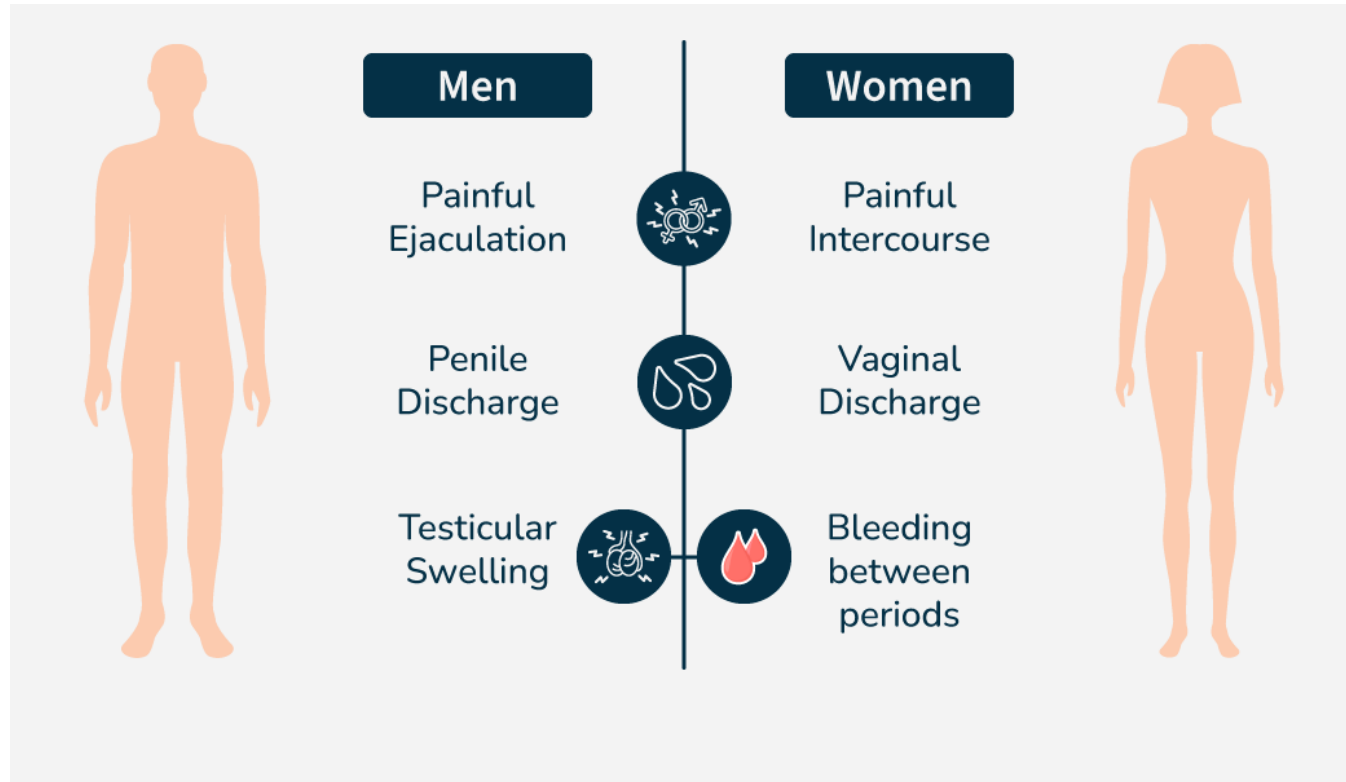
Chlamydia

Gonorrhea

Syphilis

HIV

Chlamydia



Gonorrhea

Signs and symptoms

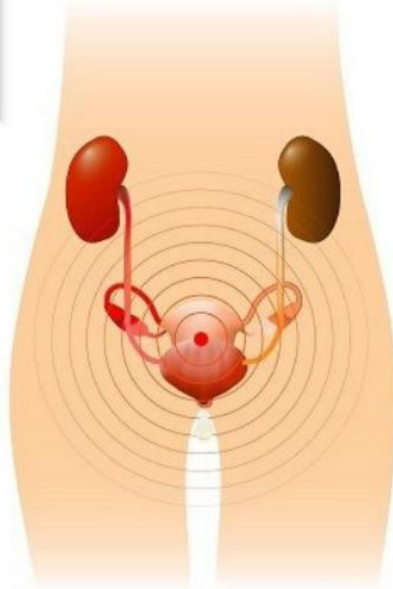
Neisseria gonorrhoeae



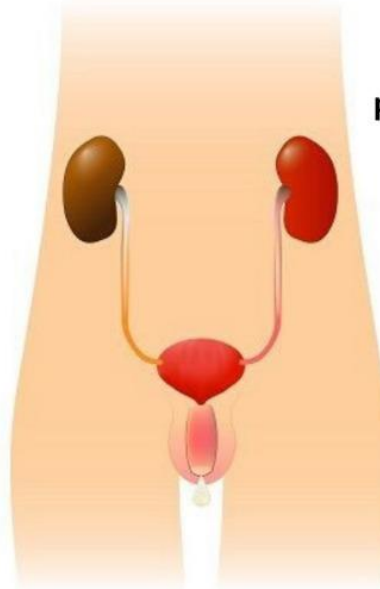
Lower abdominal or pelvic pain in females

Bleeding between periods in females

Spotting after intercourse in females



In female



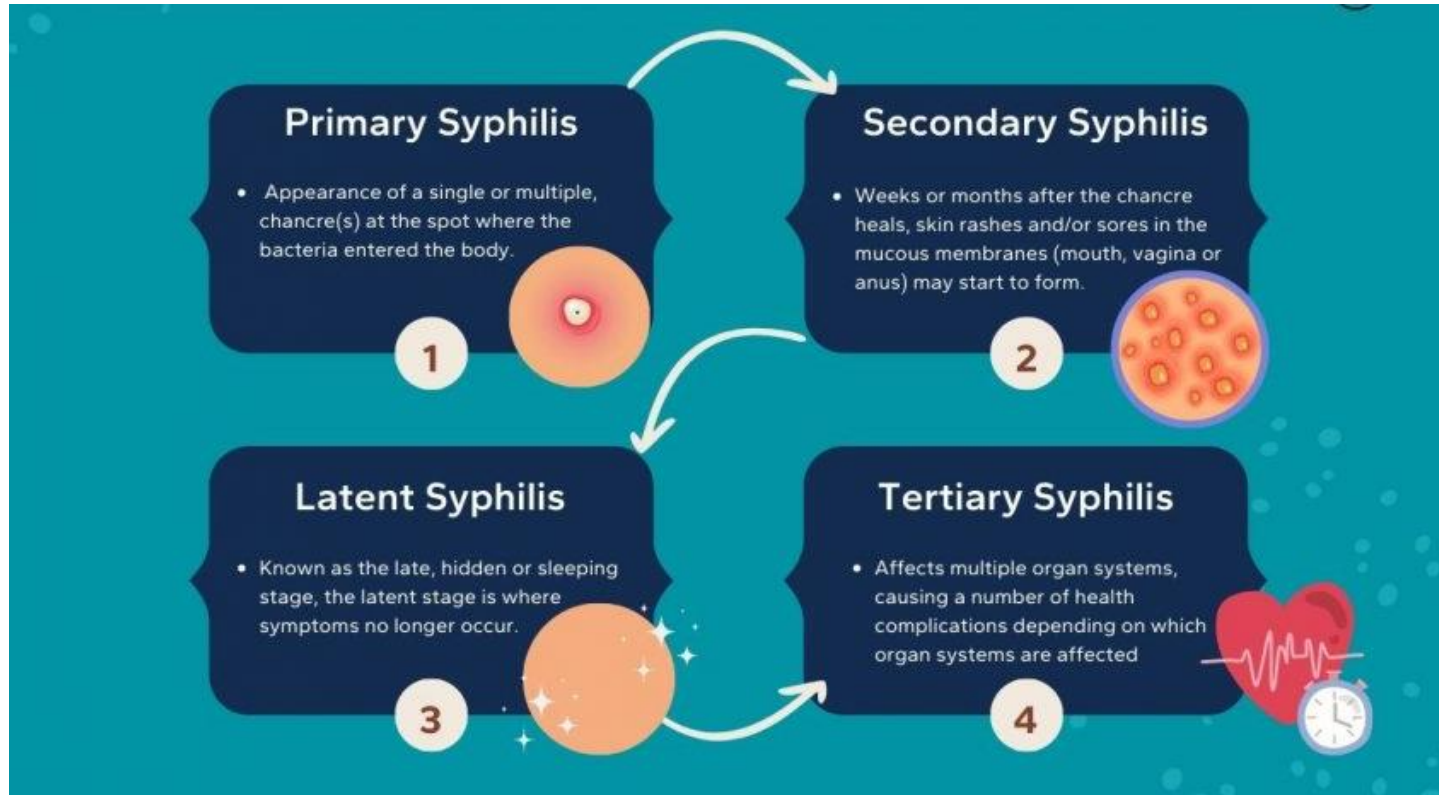
In male

Greenish yellow or whitish Discharge from private parts (in females) & penis (in males)

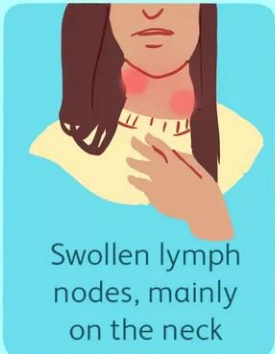
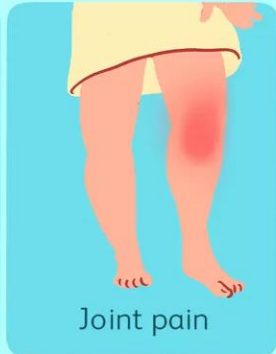
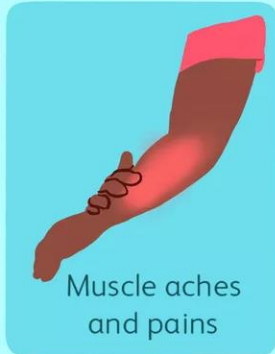
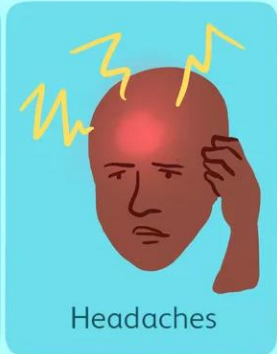
Conjunctivitis (redness, itchiness in eyes)

Swollen glands in the throat (due to oral sex)

Syphilis



HIV



*Many patients experience no symptoms

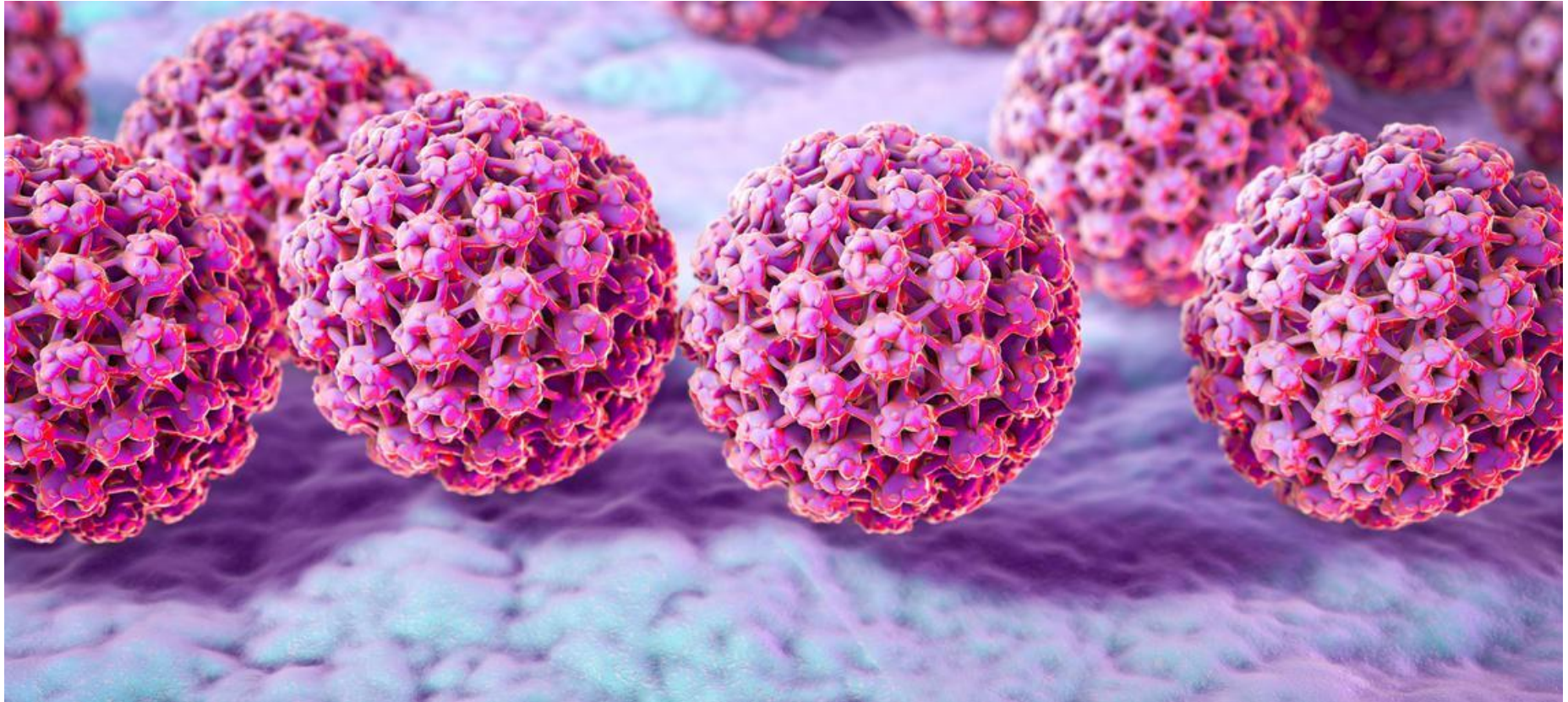
STIs can manifest differently in older adults.



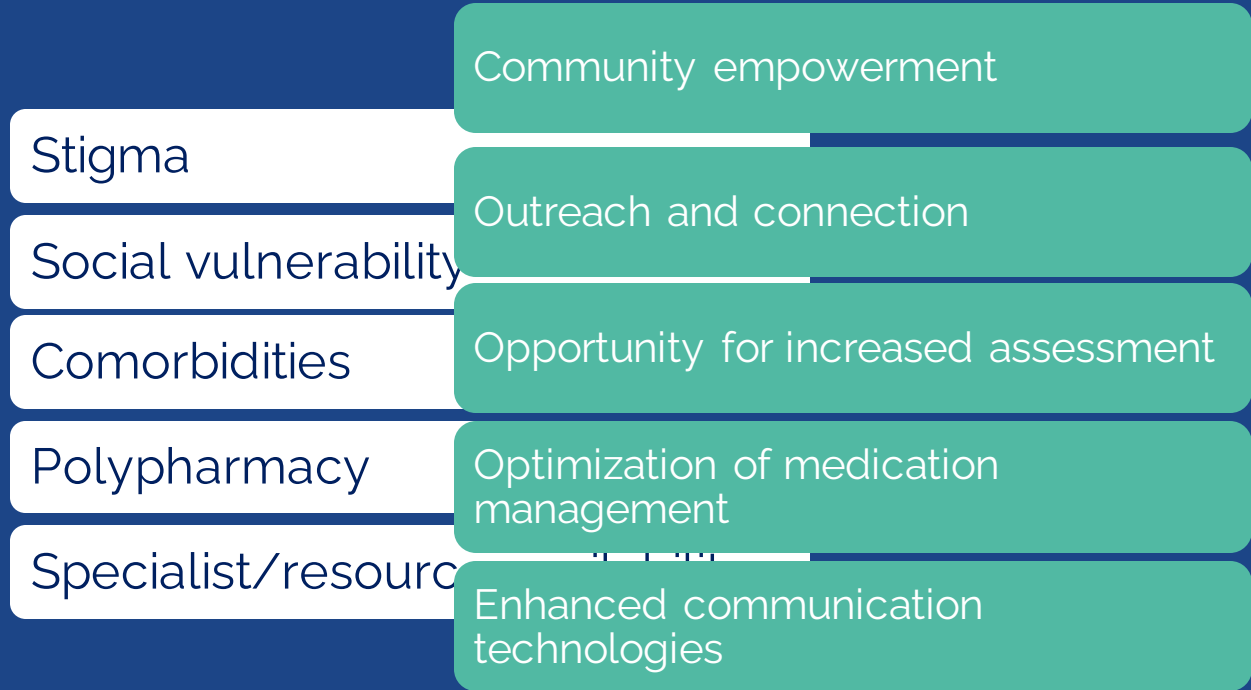
STIs can manifest differently in older adults.



Screening guidelines can get tricky.



Care for chronic infections is challenging.



Special considerations for OAs with STIs

Different symptoms can manifest in later-stage disease.

Screening guidelines are not so simple.

Care for chronic infections is challenging.

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"As a parent, you don't think about
gender equality or LGBT issues."
- Grandpa of iGays

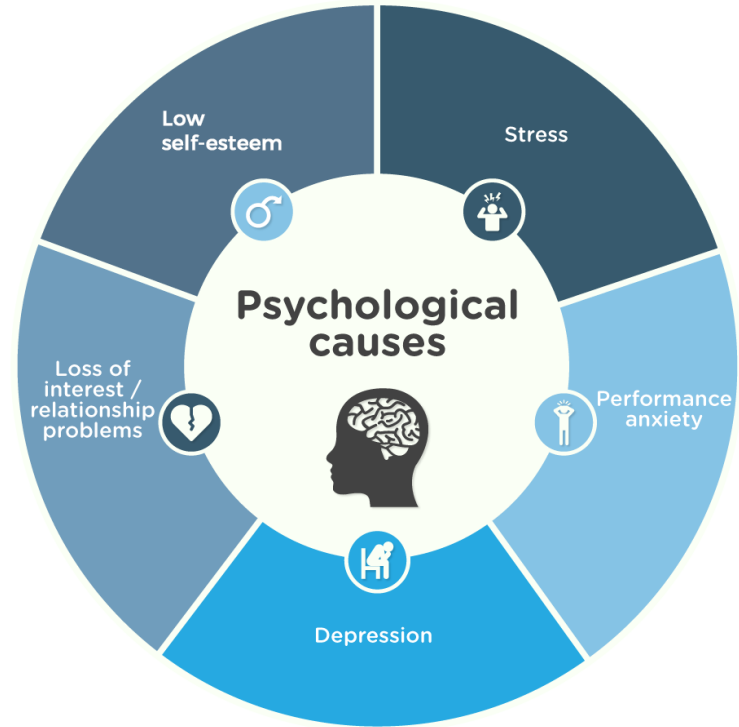
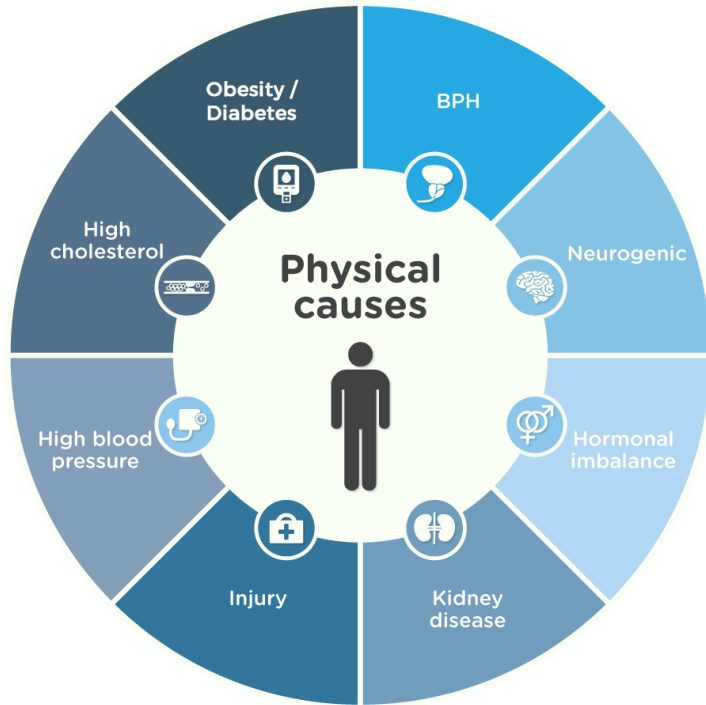
Let's think differently.

Older adults are sexually active.



Lindau et al 2008, Steckenrider 2023, Van Epps 2023; Image from NIA

Sexual dysfunction is not always a “natural” part of aging.



Older adults should be screened for STIs.



Image from Action Canada



Photo by David Pereiras from Noun Project

Barriers to discussing sex

- Lack of training for healthcare professionals
- Patient-provider relationship
- Cultural views
- Stigma and embarrassment

Taking ageism out of the STI equation:

**Normalize
discussion of sex**

**Inclusion of OAs
in trials**

**Expand and
maintain
education**

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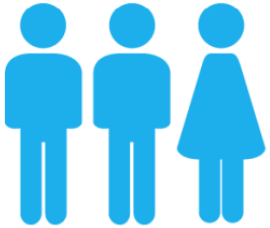


~~The 5Ps~~

The 6Ps



Permission



Partners



Practices



Past History
of STDs



Protection
from STDs



Pregnancy
Plans

Permission

**Limited
Information**

**Specific
suggestions**

**Intensive
Therapy**

"Can we talk more about the discomfort you have with sex?"

"With age, there is a decrease in estrogen that can cause increased discomfort."

"One specific thing that could help is the use of lubricant."

"If this doesn't work, we can refer you to a gynecologist."

Words matter.

- Avoid editorializing language
- Avoid leading questions
- Keep it neutral





Back to the case...





Back to those questions...

What might we have been done differently?

What factors make this case difficult?

What was done well in this case?

Takeaways

STIs are rapidly increasing in our older adult population.

We need to approach STIs differently for our OAs.

Let's talk about sex (more).

Eleanor Roosevelt

“Do one thing everyday that scares you. Those small things that make us uncomfortable help us build courage to do the work we do.”



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