

Roughly men are
carriers for diseases
like



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Roughly half of the world's population are women. Women are half of the working population, half of the students, half of all living, breathing bodies worldwide. It seems obvious then, that women's health would be well-researched and well-understood by the medical body, and that hygiene products would be affordable and accessible to all women. But the harsh reality is that there is an underwhelming effort to support women with access to real education about their bodies, free hygiene products, and safe testing. The oppression of women is inexorably linked to this lack of access and few men in positions of power are willing to discuss the inequality of healthcare and wellness that perpetuates the cycle of uneducated young girls, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. When women aren't readily educated on the intricacies of their own bodies, it's no surprise that sexism persists and remains so difficult to uproot. Bodies are complex, beautiful, vibrant, and diverse; as long as the majority of data about wellness, sexual activity, and personal health relies on the cisgender male body as a standard, misinformation about their health will continue to hold women back.

What if instead, we forged a society that empowered everyone through sufficient education, free testing, and access to essential hygiene products? What if misinformation and under-researched diseases no longer kept women down? What if women felt empowered by society to take charge of their own sexual health, free from judgment? These freedoms are fundamental human rights that should not be compromised, but due to the stigma of sexual education, women are reluctant to discuss STDs with their partners. They worry about being shamed when they get tested or bring up

protection. When men are carriers for diseases like cancer-causing HPV, women must be given the resources and confidence to communicate with potential partners to keep themselves safe from the spread of diseases.

Providing free access to testing is one way to help combat the stigma. Setting up testing centers across a city makes knowledge available to everyone. STD clinics being funded and supported and direct community action are nonnegotiable if we truly wish to empower this crucial half of our population. When women are educated on their sexual health and menstrual cycles, they are given the opportunity to take back dominion over their bodies. When such a large portion of the population menstruates, it is absurd that sustainable, safe hygiene products aren't freely available or discussed. Women are often left in the dark about the potentially dangerous impact that bleached, chemical-laden tampons have, and these hygiene products are overpriced and overtaxed. Their link to cancer, hormone imbalances (responsible for things like endometriosis), and even toxic shock syndrome - which can lead to hospitalization, amputation, or even death - are kept under wraps.

If women are given free access to healthier and safer options like unbleached tampons, menstrual cups, and sponges, they are given the resources that position them for success and improved health. Women have the right to access education about their cycles, their hormones, and sexual health without being shamed for it. Too many women are reluctant to visit a doctor and discuss sexual activity for fear of being berated, when their male counterparts don't undergo this same harsh judgment. If women and the LGBTQ+ community are to thrive, it is necessary that they be given access

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to education about the rhythms of their own bodies. Funding and research on sexual organ disorders are overwhelmingly devoted to erectile dysfunction, while diseases of the ovaries and uterus like endometriosis are largely ignored, to the point where potentially life-threatening illnesses are viewed as “mystery diseases” with no known cures.

Doctors and researchers must be held accountable if women are to have dominion over their health and bodies. We need to start acknowledging how capable women are, and how underrepresented they remain in the health industry. The time for women being shamed and kept in the dark is up. Instead, men no longer have the luxury to sit back in complicit silence.

They no longer have the option to not discuss hygiene products, testing, and education. If we hope to move toward a future of understanding, success, and collaboration, it is imperative that we all work to uplift one another as a global whole. The future is here – and it is female.