



# SYPH HAPPENS

EVERYTHING YOU  
NEED TO KNOW  
ABOUT SYPHILIS

GET FACTS  
GET TESTED  
GET CURED





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# TABLE OF CONTENTS :

<u>WHAT IS SYPHILIS</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>PRIMARY SYPHILIS</u>	<u>4 - 5</u>
<u>SECONDARY SYPHILIS</u>	<u>6 - 8</u>
<u>LATENT STAGE SYPHILIS</u>	<u>9 - 10</u>
<u>TERTIARY SYPHILIS</u>	<u>11 - 13</u>
<u>TRANSMISSION</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>LIKELIHOOD OF TRANSMISSION</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>DIAGNOSIS</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>TESTING</u>	<u>17 - 18</u>
<u>TREATMENT</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<u>20 - 21</u>
<u>REFERENCES</u>	<u>22</u>



# What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a type of bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*.

Syphilis can exist in three stages, depending on how long a person has had it. Lets look at these timelines below:

**Primary Syphilis:** The onset of this is around 10 days to three months after you have been exposed to syphilis, and lasts 3-6 weeks. It begins with a sore/ chancre appearing on your body. This can be painless.

**Secondary Syphilis:** The onset of this is within 2-6 weeks of your first sore healing. It can last 6-12 weeks.

**Latent Stage:** Begins after dissipation of secondary symptoms and can last up to 3 years.

**Tertiary Syphilis:** Tertiary syphilis occurs after 3 years of contracting syphilis without accessing treatment.



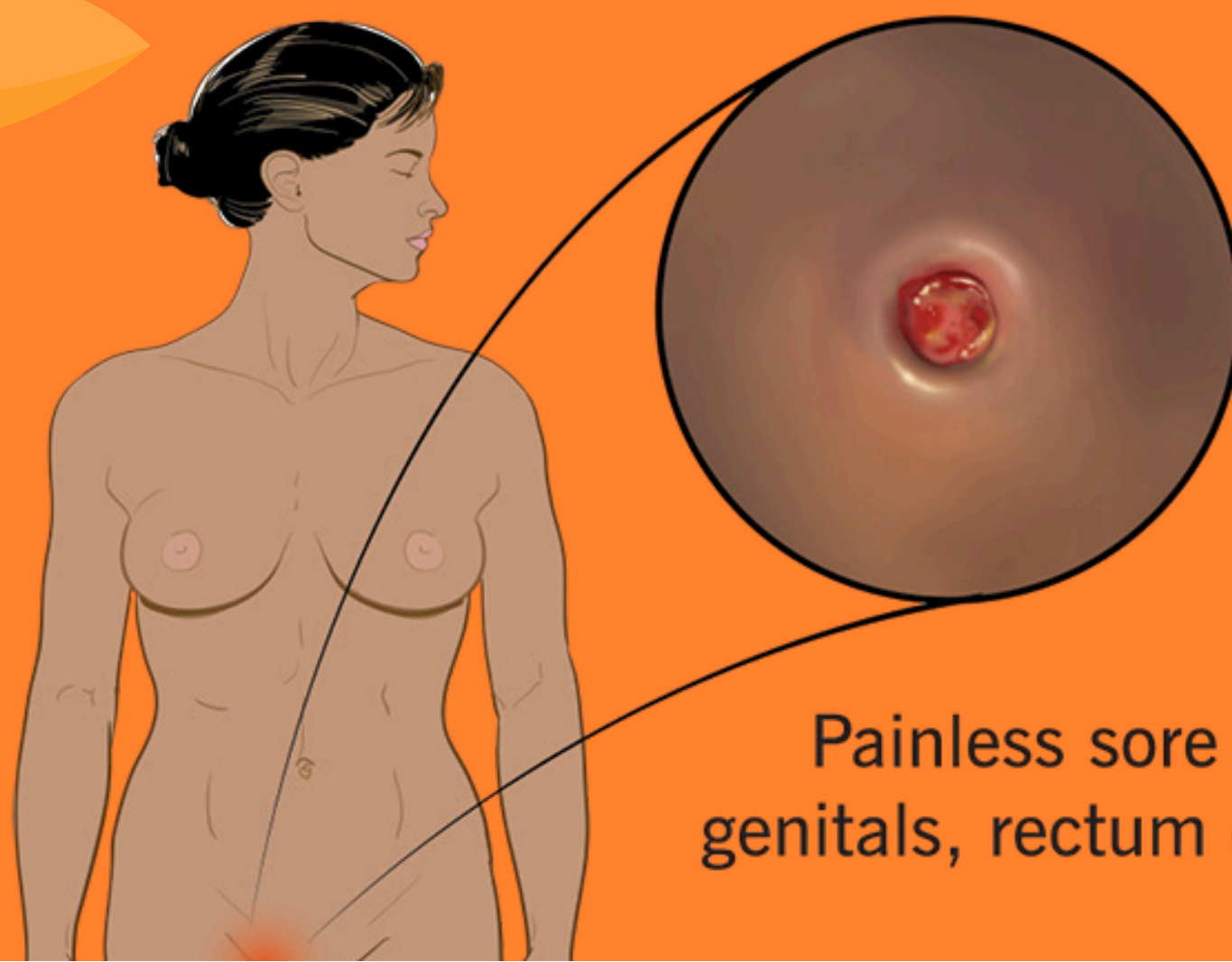
# Primary Syphilis

Primary Syphilis appears 10-90 days after initial exposure.

The main symptom at this stage is the appearance of a chancre or sore and it usually appears at the spot where the bacterium entered the body.

**What does this sore look like?**

- Usually Painless
- Firm, Round with raised edges
- Usually appears as a single sore, but there can be multiples
- No Pus or discharge
- Feels smooth, not crusty or scabby
- Can easily go unnoticed especially if it is inside the vagina, anus, rectum, mouth, or under the foreskin



**Stage 1**

Painless sore forms on  
genitals, rectum or mouth

# Primary Syphilis

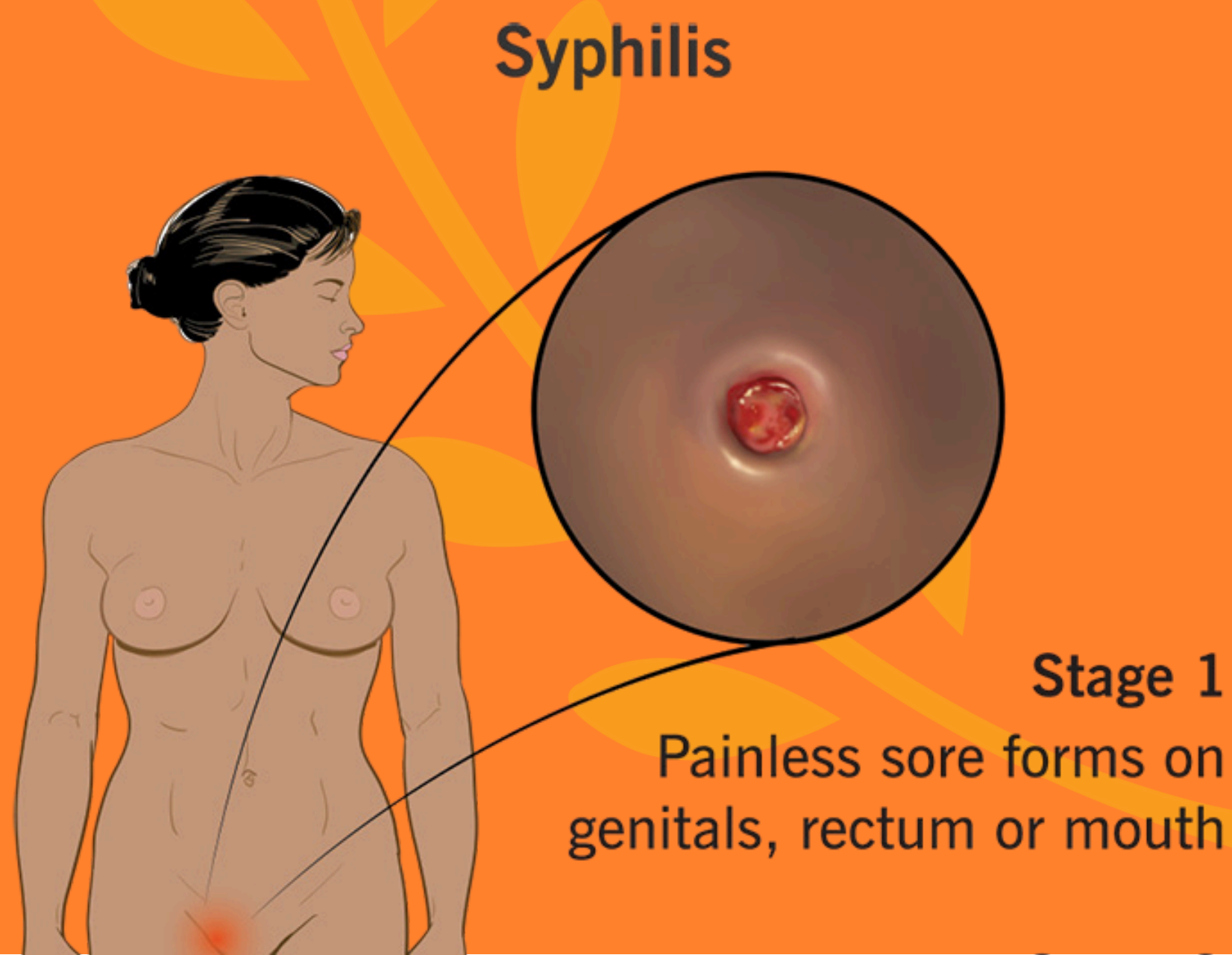
Common locations for sore to appear

- Genital area:
- Penis, vulva, vagina, cervix
- Anus or rectum
- Mouth or lips (if exposed through oral sex)

How long does this stage last?

- This stage lasts 3 to 6 weeks, then the sore heals on its own

Even though the sore will heal, you are still highly contagious at this time.



# Secondary Syphilis

Secondary Syphilis appears approximately 2-6 weeks after the first chancre heals.

**Symptoms of the Secondary stage:**

Skin Rash (most common)

- Typically non-itchy

Appears on:

- Palms of the hands
- Soles of the feet
- Trunk, arms, legs — can be widespread or faint

May look:

- Reddish or copper-colored
- Flat or slightly raised
- Sometimes mistaken for other rashes (e.g., pityriasis rosea, psoriasis)



# Secondary Syphilis

Symptoms of the Secondary stage:

## Mucous Membrane Lesions

- Grayish-white patches inside:
- Mouth
- Throat
- Genital or anal areas
- Called mucous patches — highly infectious

## Condyloma lata (wart-like growths)

- Large, raised, flat, moist lesions
- Appear in warm, moist areas (e.g., groin, perineum, under breasts, around the anus)
- Very infectious

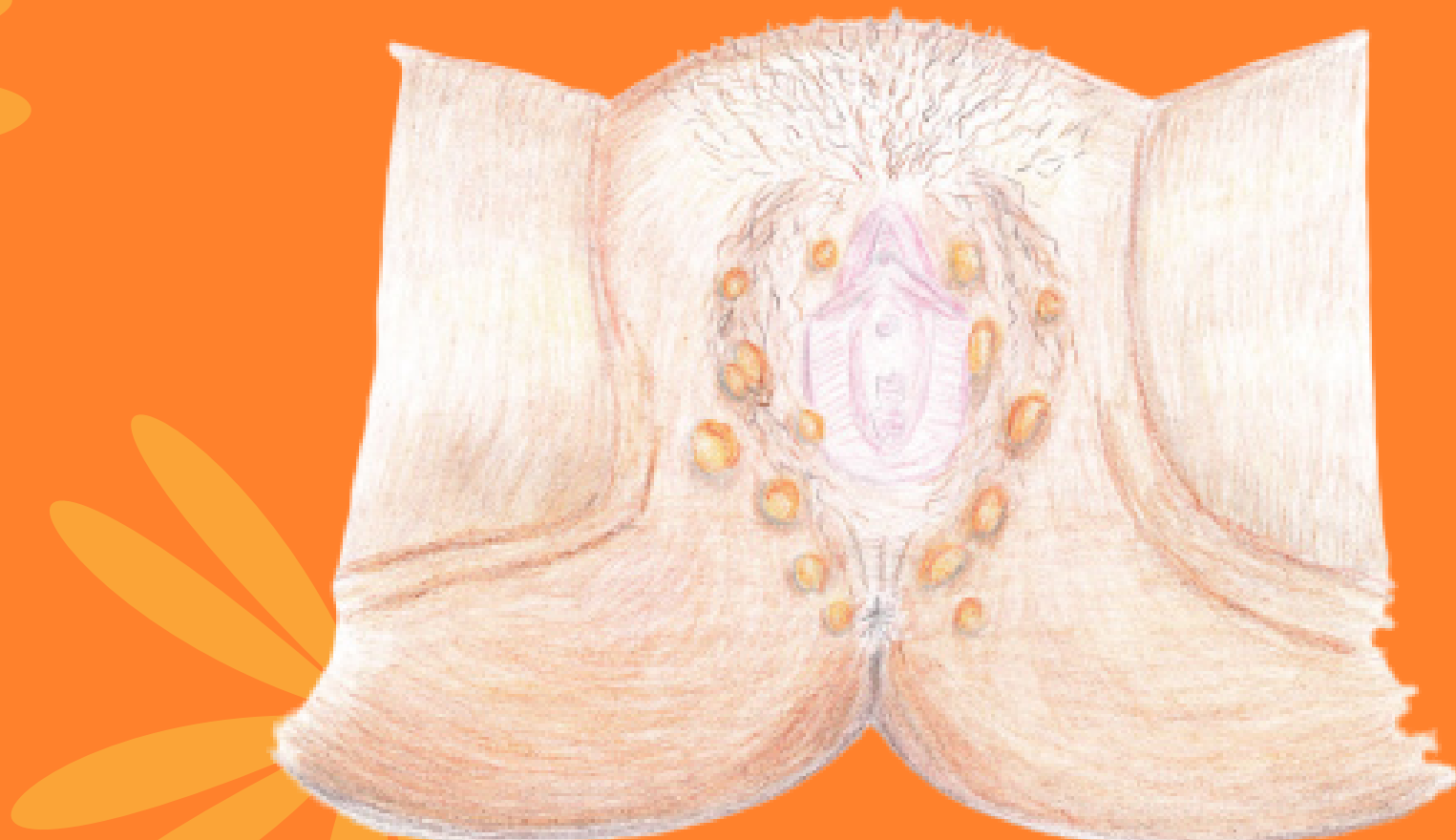


Fig: Condyloma Lata

# Secondary Syphilis

Symptoms of the Secondary stage:

Flu-like symptoms:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Muscle aches
- Headaches

Hair loss (less common):

- Patchy scalp hair loss ("moth-eaten" appearance)

This stage can last weeks to months, and symptoms may come and go.



# Latent Stage Syphilis

Latent stage starts after secondary symptoms disappear.

## Symptoms of the Latent stage:

This stage is symptomless and only detectable through blood tests.

## Duration of the Latent Stage:

### Early Latent (within 1 year of infection)

- Still potentially contagious
- May still have relapses of secondary symptoms

### Late Latent (after 1 year)

- Generally not contagious sexually
- Still infectious to a fetus during pregnancy
- Can last for years or decades

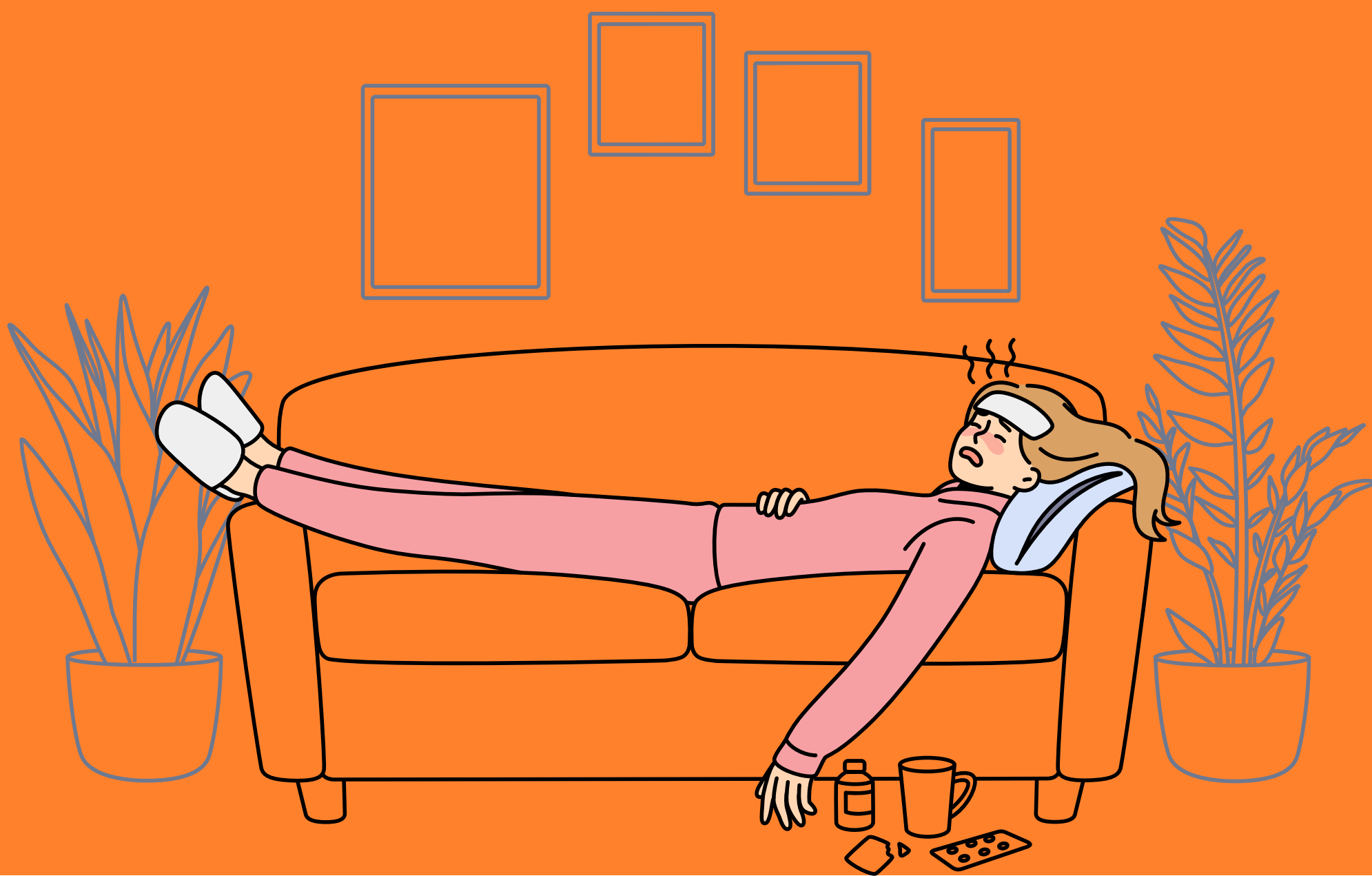


# Latent Stage Syphilis

Whats happening to your body?

In this stage, the infection has become systemic and untreated latent syphilis can lead to severe long-term complications and damage to vital organs.

- Damage to Heart and Blood Vessels.
- Neurological issues such as paralysis and lack of muscle control.
- The infection can manifest as tumors on your Liver, Bones or Joints.
- Syphilis can also spread to the eyes and ears, causing vision problems, hearing loss, and balance issues.



# Tertiary Syphilis

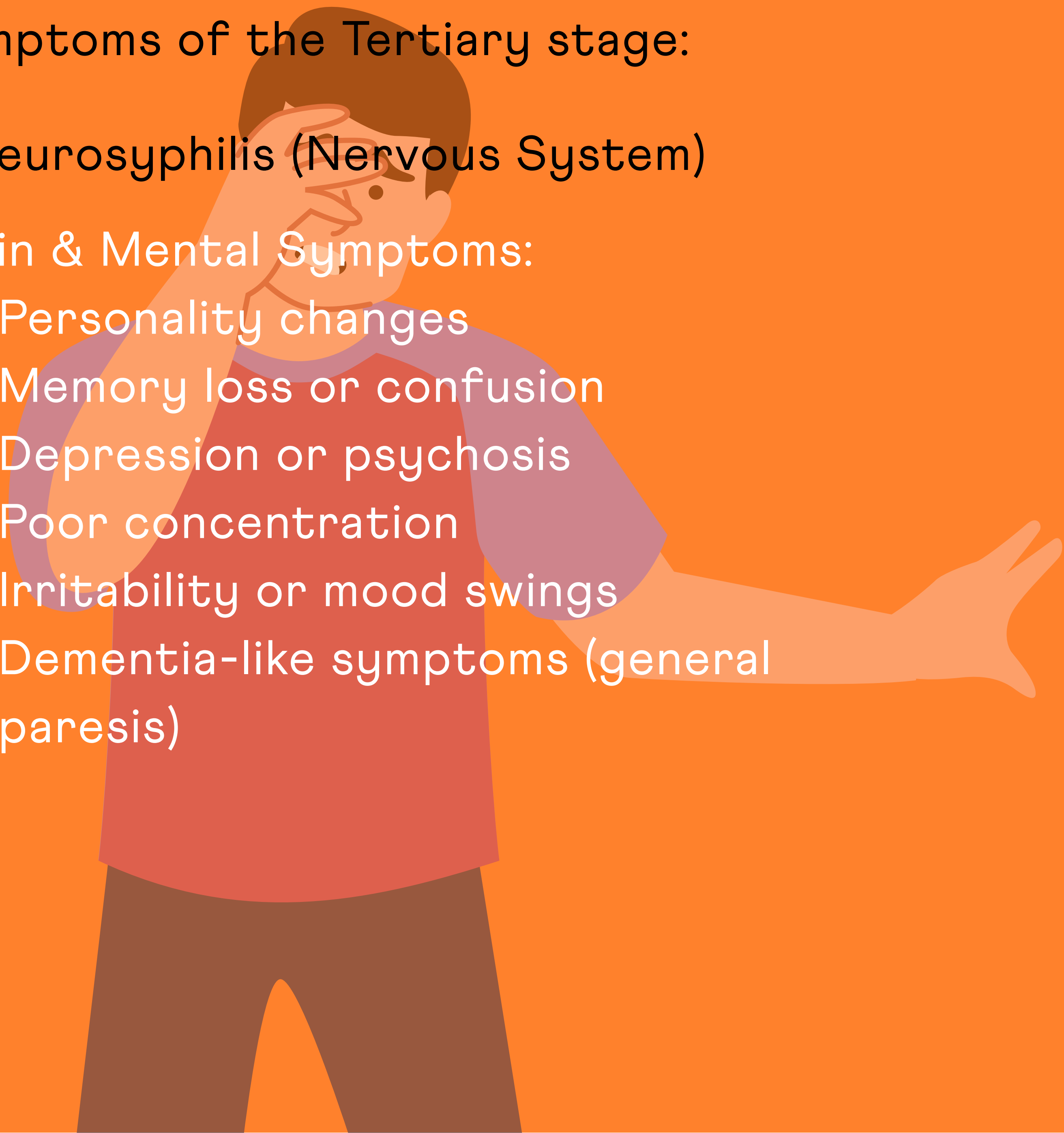
This happens 3 to 30+ years after the initial infection and happens in ~15–30% of people who are untreated. This follows the latent stage, even if you had no symptoms for years

Symptoms of the Tertiary stage:

## 1. Neurosyphilis (Nervous System)

Brain & Mental Symptoms:

- Personality changes
- Memory loss or confusion
- Depression or psychosis
- Poor concentration
- Irritability or mood swings
- Dementia-like symptoms (general paresis)



# Tertiary Syphilis

Symptoms of the Tertiary stage:

## 2. Spinal Cord/Nerve Symptoms:

- Loss of coordination (ataxia)
- Muscle weakness or paralysis (partial or full)
- Numbness, tingling, or shooting pain
- Urinary incontinence
- Impotence
- Tabes dorsalis:
  - Lightning-like pain in legs
  - Unsteady gait
  - Loss of reflexes
  - Difficulty walking in the dark



# Tertiary Syphilis

Symptoms of the Tertiary stage:

## 3. Eye Involvement (Ocular Syphilis):

- Blurred vision
- Eye pain
- Redness
- Blindness (if untreated)

## 4. Ear Involvement (Otic Syphilis)

- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- Hearing loss
- Vertigo or dizziness



# Transmission

How do I get syphilis?

You can get syphilis from:

- skin-to-skin contact or coming into direct contact with a syphilis sore
- condomless sex (oral, vaginal, anal)
- to a foetus during pregnancy (congenital syphilis)
- a blood transfusion (although this is very unlikely in Ireland as all blood donors are tested).

Can I get syphilis from oral sex?

Yes.

You cannot get syphilis by:

- hugging
- swimming pools or baths
- toilet seats
- sharing cutlery or towels.



# Likelihood of Transmission

Primary, secondary and early latent stages are considered infectious, with an estimated risk of transmission per partner of 51% to 64%. Early latent syphilis is considered infectious because of the 25% chance of relapse to the secondary stage.

Most infants with congenital syphilis are infected in utero, but they can also be infected by contact with an active genital lesion at the time of delivery. The risk of transmission to the fetus is 70% to 100% in untreated pregnant people with primary or secondary syphilis and 40% with early latent syphilis.





# Testing

Free, confidential and Rapid test for Syphilis is available at GOSHH. To book an appointment,

- Email @ [personalsupport@goshh.ie](mailto:personalsupport@goshh.ie)
- Contact us : 061 314 354

Testing times at GOSHH:

- Monday: 9:30am - 4:00pm
- Tuesday: 9:30am - 4:00pm
- Wednesday: 11:30am - 4:00pm
- Thursday: 9:30am - 4:00pm

You can also get free home STI tests. The HSE free home STI testing service is available to anyone aged 17 or older who lives in the Republic of Ireland. You can also collect the SH:24 Kits from GOSHH

# Testing

## CLINIC INFORMATION:

STI Clinic – University  
Hospital Limerick  
•STI

Saint Nessian's Road  
Limerick, V94 F858

Phone: 061 482382

Internal Directions:  
Department of Infectious  
Diseases

Opening hours: Tuesday,  
9am to 12pm and 1.30pm to  
3pm. Thursday, 9am to  
12pm

Contact Person: STI Clinic  
Secretary

STI Clinic – Ennis  
Hospital  
•STI

Gort Road, Clare, V95  
HN29

Phone: 061 482382

Opening hours:  
Monday, 9am – 1pm

Contact Person:  
Consultant Secretary

STI Clinic – Nenagh  
Hospital  
•STI

Tyone, Nenagh South,  
Tipperary, E45 PT86

Phone: 061 31491  
061482382

Internal Directions: This  
service is located in the  
Outpatients Department  
at the back of the  
hospital

Opening hours:  
Wednesday 2pm-5pm

Contact Person: Clinical  
Nurse Specialist

In places some GP practices and family planning services may  
provide STI testing services for a fee.

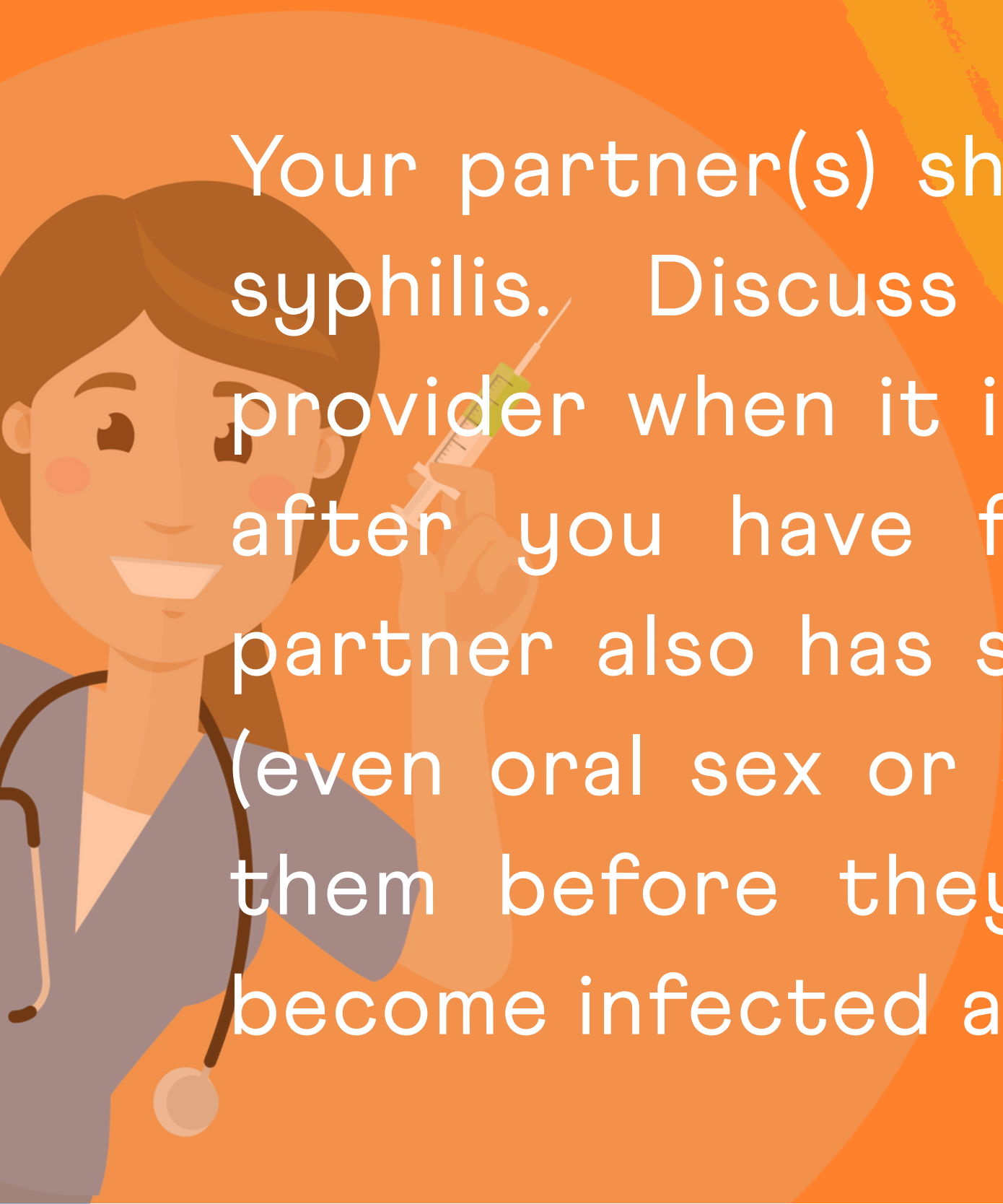
# Treatment



Syphilis should be treated at an STI clinic. Syphilis can be treated and cured with antibiotics, usually injections of penicillin and may involve one or more doses, depending on what kind of syphilis you have and the stage of the infection. If you are allergic to penicillin, there are other treatments available.

Once the treatment has finished, the clinic will carry out further blood tests to make sure the infection has gone.

Your partner(s) should also get tested for syphilis. Discuss with your healthcare provider when it is okay to have sex again after you have finished treatment. If a partner also has syphilis and you have sex (even oral sex or sex with a condom) with them before they are treated, you may become infected again.



# Prevention

- Safer sex practices: Using Condoms Correctly and consistently
- Get Tested Regularly: Routine screening is important. Early detection allows treatment before it spreads or causes serious damage
- Open communication: Having open conversations about sexual health with your partner(s) reduces risk.
- Syphilis in pregnancy: Syphilis testing is routinely offered to all people as part of antenatal care. Passing syphilis to the unborn child can be prevented by treating syphilis during pregnancy. Sometimes babies need to be treated too.



# Prevention

Having syphilis once does not protect you from getting it again. It is important to make sure that your partner(s) have been tested and treated before having sex with them again. Use condoms every time you have sex. If you have a new partner, it is a good idea for both of you to have an STI test before any condomless sex.



# References

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