

RoyalTea: Hot Tips to Sip for Sexual Empowerment



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Sip 1– Our Secret Strength



OUR SECRET STRENGTH

A tea kettle is whistling on a hot stove with the call of our...

ancestors to preserve our legacy,
sexual health experts to protect our bodies,
and inner wisdom to support our wellbeing,

It's RoyalTea time.

This table has been set for Black women of all ages and backgrounds to sip on the hottest tips for sexual empowerment.

Thirsty? This type of tea hasn't been served in our community...until now.

It's tea because the message is classified. It's Royal because we are Queens.

The secret? Black women are super...powerful.

Despite the attempts to marginalize us, we have a power, a royal force within us made from love and laughter, sweat and tears, the blood of our ancestors, plus secret spices that give us a profoundly original flavor.

Black Girl Magic is not just a hashtag; it's our DNA.

RoyalTea is not just a tea party, it's also a reminder that anywhere Black women sit is a throne.

Without the superhero metaphor we were initially making, this language just feels pushed to me now. Plus, we kind of state the same point (power vs weakness) we were working to address here, in the next sentence. Thoughts?

Our power is not only founded in our physical and intellectual strengths, but our hope and resilience to overcome weaknesses.

Black women are attaining education and career milestones at incredible rates, but also have epidemic rates of maternal mortality, HIV, obesity, diabetes, and hypertension.

While our grandmothers saw the enemy in hoods and our mothers witnessed the enemy in suits, today's racism is a casual, but calculated terrorism on our health. The lack of medical resources provided to Black women is a modern-day conspiracy against our right to live.

From the sexual violence on the plantation,
to today's use of our curves as exploitation,
that has been used as a justification,
for our sexual abuse, assault, and great infection,

Black women have been fighting for ownership of our bodies, our sex, and our health for over 400 years. We are in the age of the Sexual Rights Movement for the Melanated and we need everyone reading this Tea to march because this unresolved history continues to impact our sexual health today.

We know you came here for "12 Steps to Healthier Sex" more than "12 Years A Slave," but like the proverb says, "We must learn from whence we've come, in order to know the way that we must go."

Created by Black women, for Black women, Upspoken turns the past whisper of our power into a present-day tea kettle whistle to alert Black women that it is our time to win this fight and reclaim our health.

RoyalTea takes the innate power of Black women and brews it with sexual empowerment to pour protection and pleasure tips into our community. Sipping this Tea will equip us to:

- MAKE decisions for and about our bodies without shame, stigma, or guilt

- TAKE control of our sexual health and speak up for our needs loudly and unapologetically
- DETERMINE our path for reproductive choices and STI prevention in a healthy way
- IMPROVE the way we show up for ourselves in love, sex, and relationships

We're here as a resource for Black women to refresh the relationship with our bodies (she misses you), at our own pace (we are not all the same), and create tactics to enrich our sexual health, sexual care, and sexual pleasure (yep, that's important too).

No longer will Black women have the highest new cases of HIV and levels of mortality for every major cause of death. Powered with RoyalTea, we'll be armed with hot tips to sip on for our proper care.

Sisters, let's sip together and amplify our power because like Nikki Giovanni said, there is a reason for our Ego Tripping.

I am...
 so perfect
 so divine
 so ethereal
 so surreal
 I cannot be comprehended
 except by my permission.

I mean ... I ... can fly like a bird in the sky ...

EXERCISE:

Tonight, write three of your strengths on a post-it and put it on your bathroom mirror. When you wake up, you'll be reminded of how powerful you are before taking on the day. If your partner tries to take it down, let them know they need a reminder of your power too.

Check out the resources section to go deeper on this topic. Meantime, continue to the next chapter to sip on more of the latest self-care and health care methods.

Sip 2– Our Bodies

Sip 🖐️ On 🖐️ This 🖐️



OUR BODIES

Sis, with the agency we have to produce life and nutrients, our bodies function as gardens.

We have minds that serve as fences for protection, reproduction systems that house the seeds of life, and a flower called a vagina that provides a portal for new beings to bloom.

And just like the tulips in our auntie's garden, our bodies need tending to. Though it seems that some of us have lost our green, or better yet, brown thumbs.

But no worries, RoyalTea is here to reacquaint us with our garden, our bodies, and help us to fully embrace this magnificent piece of engineering.

No matter our age, experience, or preferences, we can tend to our vagina (she's the only one we get) to ensure we're healthy.

See below to see what she's made of; her purpose, her ins and outs, and her evolution over time. Ready, set, GROW!



Our vagina's power is often underestimated since she's the small tube between the vulva and cervix.

However, this little tube has a large responsibility. The vagina is flexible enough to allow babies to exit during birth and strong enough to secure a menstrual cup in place during our period.

How is our vagina so powerful? Welp...

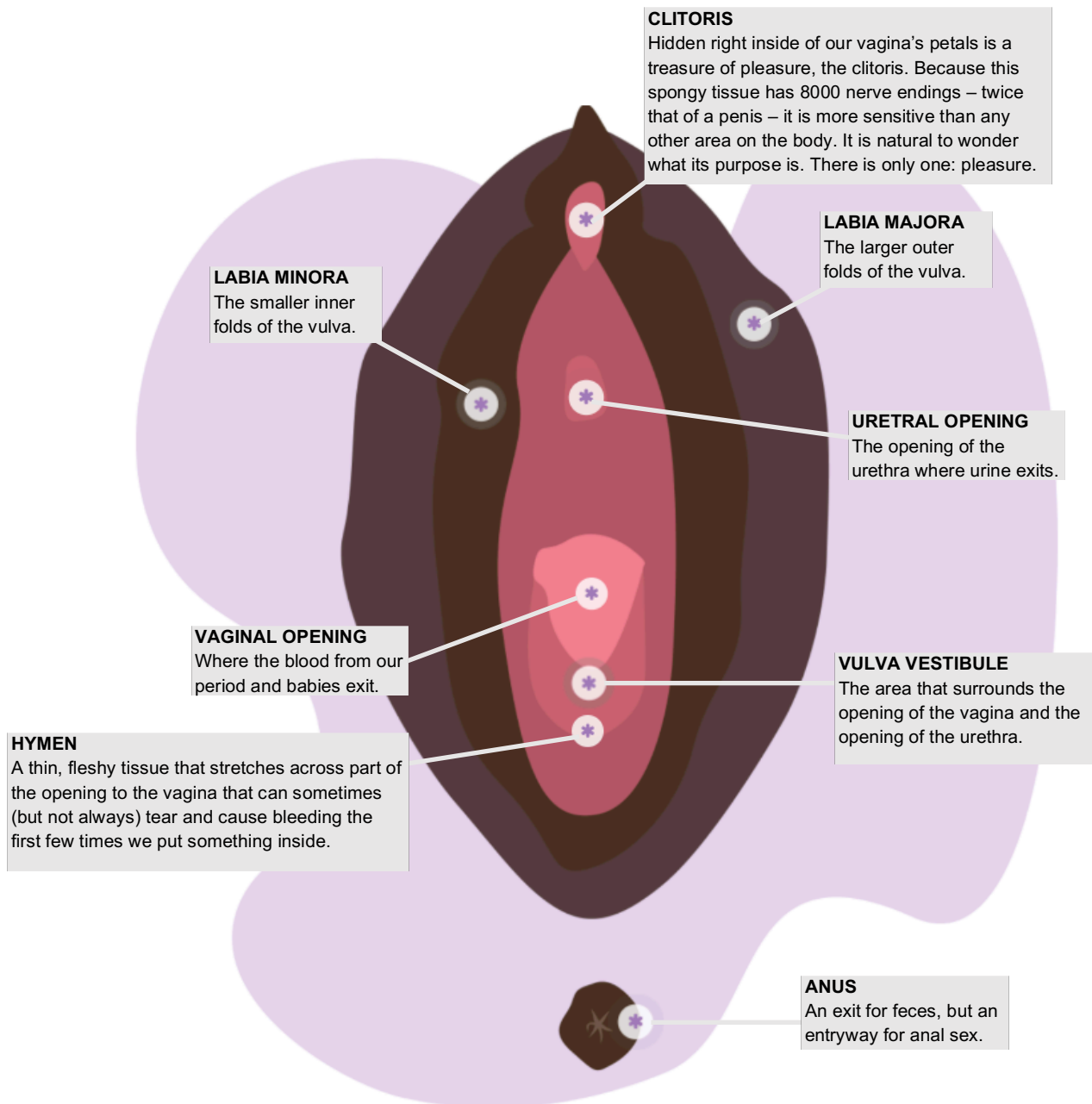
- The flowery looking walls of skin around the vagina are called rugae. These walls provide both a barrier and access route between the cervix and the outside world. Think of it as a petal of protection.
- Fluids are released through the walls of the vagina to keep the area moist, and during times of sexual arousal, to increase lubrication. Yep, she waters herself too.
- Some of us heard we can use douches to “keep our vaginas clean.” While a little spritz between the thighs feels good, just know that this regimen **will not prevent infections**. In fact, douching can actually increase the risk of infections, because it removes some of the bacteria in the vagina that protects us from infection.
 - Despite what some of us heard growing up, doctors no longer recommend douching. This is because it can change the necessary balance of vaginal flora (bacteria that live in the vagina) and natural acidity in a healthy vagina ([Source](#)). A healthy vagina has a yin and yang of good and harmful bacteria. The balance of bacteria helps maintain a moderately acidic environment and ([Source](#)).
 - The irritation and inflammation of vaginal tissues that douching causes actually makes it easier for STDs and HIV to set up shop in our bodies. Secondly, douching can actually cause an infection by disrupting the natural balance of bacteria and yeast in the vagina ([Source](#)).
 - So if you're going to douche, against doctor recommendation, please be aware that this is a risk to your vaginal health.
- Because the vagina is a mucous membrane, it can absorb everything from chemicals in tampons, medications, or contraceptives into our body. So just as we can ensure our bodies absorb healthy food, we can ensure our vaginas absorb things that maintain its health.
- We must check on her regularly as the vagina can change a lot during our life; she's impacted by hormonal changes throughout the body, she grows and evolves with us. We can discover what she feels like when she's happy, so we can feel the difference when she's sad, and take care of her appropriately.

Below is an opportunity to digitally discover our vaginas and learn how each part functions.

Welcome to Operation “Get to Know Your Vagina, Girl”

EXERCISE:

Read through each area of the image to see its purpose.



Our libido is our sex drive or desire for sexual activity. She can't be illustrated as she can't be seen, she's a state of being.

All libidos are different; some of ours increase with age, while others decrease, and then some just stay the same. Just like our hair, skin and nails, our bodies change with age, which can impact our sexual health and sex life when active.

The most commonly known libido dropper is menopause. More than hot flashes, menopause triggers a decrease in estrogen levels, which impacts libido and can create a....

- Decrease in elasticity and a thinning of the vaginal tissue
- Decrease in the amount of lubrication
- Decrease in anticipation before orgasm
- Decrease in orgasm intensity (however, the sensitivity of the clitoris remains the same)

These changes could make certain types of sexual activity, such as vaginal penetration, painful, less desirable, or more risky (dry skin tears more easily).

Again, menopause is the most well-known (or most visible due to those dang hot flashes), but it's not the only cause of libido reduction. Other common causes include:

- Bad Sex - If sex is painful or unpleasurable, then it will reduce your urge to have sex in the first place.
- Non-Sex Related Illness - Conditions such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and neurological diseases can impact sex drive.
- Medications - Some prescription drugs, especially antidepressants called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (or selective libido snatchers), are known to lower the sex drive.
- Habits - One glass of wine may turn things up in the bedroom, but too many glasses can turn our sex drive all the way down. The same rule applies to street drugs and smokers, libido decreases are coming for you too. Cigarette smoking decreases blood flow, which may dull arousal.
- Surgery - Feeling sexy contributes to feeling like having sex. So surgeries related to our breasts or genital region can affect our body image, which affects our sexual function, which affects our desire for sex. #LibidoDominoes #NotAHashtagAnyOfUsWantToUse
- Fatigue - Long days at work, followed by longer nights caring for children, partners and parents can contribute to low sex drive. In addition to physical and mental exhaustion, fatigue from illness or surgery also plays a part in decreased libidos.

If you are curious, there is a longer list of physical, hormonal and psychological things that can affect intimacy with your partner ([Source](#)).

But don't let all this libido talk get you down. Sis, WE GOT YOU.

From one powerful Black woman to another, we've got a tip for you that Big Mama never gave us. When vaginal dryness becomes an issue, using water-based lubricating jelly or lubricated condoms will keep us safe and comfortable.

For the anal sex fans out there it should be noted that the anus doesn't make its own lubrication. Since dry, unlubricated skin tears more easily, using lube helps with the insertion of a penis or sex toy. Have fun, but be safe when enjoying anal penetration. Specifically:

- Use a new condom when transitioning between anal and vaginal sex.
- You wouldn't have sex with a dirty penis or fist so make sure your sex toys and beads are clean as well before use.

EXERCISE:

If you are sexually active, try lubricating jelly and condoms for your next sexual escapade. See how sweet putting some jelly between those "bread" sheets can be.

Your Vow

Tea time (whether beverage or gossip) is a daily routine.

RoyalTea is no different. It's a daily mantra to caffeinate us with more power and positive action in our everyday lives.

Being Black and being women, there's a dual duty we carry in taking care of our community and our families. But with all this responsibility, we can't forget that there's nothing more powerful than our will to take care of ourselves.

Just think about it, even the safety videos on planes instruct us to put our breathing masks on first, so we can be more productive in helping others. Message! We can take care of others best, when we are properly taking care of ourselves.

So queen, let's sip our RoyalTea daily and make a lifetime commitment to our wellness. Think of this as a series of vows for us to take, to make the best decisions for our health and well-being.

See below to view vows we created as examples:

- I vow to treat myself with love and kindness.

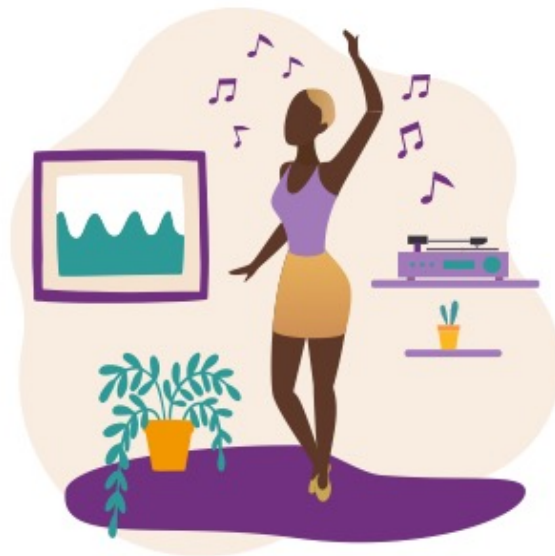
- I vow to make space to work through my past experiences and use them as a launch pad for growth.
- I vow to take some me-time and make space for more joy in my life.
- I vow to exercise my right to choose whether to engage in sex and a method of protection that works for my intimate moments.
- I vow to choose a partner who is willing to get tested with me and values my health and well-being.
- I vow to prioritize the health and wellness of my body and mind.

EXERCISE:

Use this general list as inspiration to create vows that are specific to your needs. We are all living lives at different ages and stages, so write 5-10 customized vows that reflect where you aspire to grow. Share these commitments with a friend who can maintain confidentiality AND who will vow to help keep you accountable for maintaining your powers.

Sip 3– **Our Sexual Soundtrack**

Pair this sip with a snack as we're in for a fun and informative ride.



OUR SEXUAL SOUNDTRACK

Sex is multifaceted; it's not just what we do between the sheets, but how we do it, and how we choose to do it safely.

Sex is multifaceted; it's not just what we do between the sheets, but how we do it, and how we choose to do it safely.

This chapter is divided into four sections so we can conquer all the info we need for a healthy sex life.

And because music is the soundtrack of our lives, including our sex lives, let's explore this chapter using some of the greatest song titles in Black music.

Let's talk about sex, baby

Let's talk about you and me

Let's talk about all the good things

*And the bad things that may be
Let's talk about sex
Let's talk about sex
Let's talk about sex
Let's talk about sex*

“I Will Survive”

*At first we were afraid
We were petrified
Kept thinking how we'd have safe sex with all these STIs
Then we spent so many nights, making Tea to mend this wrong
And it was strong
And we're learning how to get along...*

Yes sisters, we are sipping for survival, but we will do more than survive – we will thrive. With Black women having the highest STI rates of any other group, RoyalTea is here to serve hot tips to protect us from infection and promote our healthy sex lifestyles.

“We” means all of us; all ages and levels of sexual activity. Whether our sex calendar is busy or on sabbatical, it's important to review this information for the sexual safety of us all.



Keep reading for a handy directory of various methods of protection from STIs, HIV, and pregnancy.

What's an STI? No worries if you don't know, that's why we have RoyalTea.

A Sexually Transmitted Infection is the technical term for what happens when whether

married or single,
gay or straight,
young or old,

we hook up, without being hooked up with protection and risk catching a sexually transmitted infection.

STIs are most often spread by sexual contact via vaginal, anal and oral sex. However, they can also be spread through non-sexual means like blood or blood products ([Source](#)).

Below are STI tips to sip on:

1. Get Tested

- a. No matter our age, sexual orientation or relationship status, we must get tested because there is a risk of contracting HIV and other STIs.
 - STIs don't discriminate by age so whether we're "Spring Chickens" or "Silver Foxes," this information is relevant to all of us.
 - Gay or straight, STIs don't discriminate.
 - Whether we check single, married, divorced, or none of your business on the marital status box, STIs can still check us.
 - Black women have different hair, skin, and body types, but there is one thing that remains the same between us; we all need regularly tests at a doctor's office or clinic to ensure we are STI free. Sis, it's the only way to confirm if we are safe from infection or in need of care.
 - The CDC (Center for Disease Control) estimates that, at some point in their lifetimes, one in 48 African American women will be diagnosed with HIV ([Source](#)). To sidestep this statistic, the CDC recommends that everyone aged 13 - 64 get tested for HIV annually. Whether or not we are insured or have a regular doctor, we can get tested for free at a [location near you](#).
 - We can't know if we've contracted an STI unless we get tested, then re-tested 3 months after a sexual encounter ([Source](#)). Depending where we live, the cost of the retest can be complementary or come with an additional charge. But like L'Oréal says, "you're worth it" so please make this investment. [CLICK HERE](#) to discover testing facilities near you!
 - Of new cases of HIV diagnosed among women in the U.S. in 2017, 86% were contracted via heterosexual contact and 59% were African American women ([Source](#)).
 - To those of us thinking this is too much testing, think about how often we go to the hair or nail salon. To those of us thinking there's no way we could be the one with HIV, about 1 in 7 people in the United States who have HIV don't know they have it. Things that make you go hmmm....

- b. There are different STI tests, so it should come as no surprise that they work differently. To support proper testing, we deserve to know what type of test our doctors are providing and why. But the test isn't the end of the journey, because the infection may not be detected by the first test following exposure.
- c. That's because no HIV test can detect HIV immediately after infection. If there's a chance you've been exposed to HIV in the last 72 hours, talk to your health care provider about post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), right away.
- d. You can also talk to your doctor about another tool for HIV prevention. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medication that must be taken daily to protect against HIV. For more information, see <http://prep.bwhi.org/>."
- e. The time between when a person may have been exposed to HIV and when a test can tell for sure whether they have HIV is called the window period. The window period varies from person to person and depends on the type of test used to detect HIV ([Source](#)).
- f. If you're having sex, you can get tested with your sexual partner.
 - To those of us thinking this is too awkward of a topic to broach on a date, there are benefits to initiating a conversation with our partner about sexual health. Knowing the HIV status of our sexual partner is not just a courtesy, it's our right. We can ask our partners to get tested before becoming sexually intimate -- or after. It's never too late.
 - We can also be prepared to be asked to get tested too. This information exchange goes both ways.
 - To those of us who are too nervous to make the initial ask, grab a girlfriend you trust and rehearse the scene, or put yourself in front of a mirror and practice like Issa Rae does in "Insecure."
 - For all of us to use and share, we've provided practice tools in the next chapter to navigate tough and uncomfortable conversations.

2. Condoms

a. Male Condoms

- The condoms worn by men ironically empower women to take control of their bodies with protection from infection and pregnancy. Plus we can have some pretty amazing orgasms when we don't have to worry about the aforementioned fears.
- For more tips and sips on how to properly use a male condom, check out these charts and facts [here](#).

b. Female (AKA Internal) Condoms

- In addition to the advantages listed above, we can put female condoms in our vagina a couple of hours before sex and it actually stimulates us.
- In fact, internal condoms increase pleasure for BOTH partners during sex.
 - To those of us wondering how, it's because while the inner ring of the female condom arouses us during the insertion process, when rubbed around our vulva and clitoris, it also stimulates the head of the penis. This also makes them fun for foreplay.
 - To those of us wondering where we can buy a female condom, find them at...

- most contraception clinics
- most sexual health or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics
- some young people's services
- some local sexual health services
- some pharmacies
- some supermarkets
- some websites
- We're saying "most" and "some" a lot because they aren't available everywhere and when you do find them you need to make sure they have the European CE mark or British BSI Kitemark. This means they have been tested to the required safety standards.
- Those of us who have bought an internal condom and are wondering how to use it, RoyalTea says to try this.
 - Open the packet and remove the female condom, taking care not to tear it. Do not open the packet with your teeth.
 - Squeeze the smaller ring at the closed end of the condom and put it into the vagina.
 - Make sure the large ring at the open end of the condom covers the area around the opening of the vagina.
 - Make sure the penis goes in the female condom, not between the condom and the side of the vagina.
 - After sex, remove the female condom immediately by gently pulling it out. You can twist the large ring to prevent semen leaking out.
 - Throw away the condom in a bin, not the toilet.
 - More of a visual learner? See Planned Parenthood's instructional video Click [HERE](#) to see Planned Parenthood's instructional video.
- Word to the wise
 - Internal condoms can be used for anal [or](#) vaginal sex.

3. Lubrication

- a. Believe it or not, lubrication impacts both sexual pleasure and minimizing STI risk.
- b. Oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline, cooking oils, and baby oils break down latex, which can weaken the condom or cause it to break.
- c. On the other hand, silicone-based lubricants deteriorate the surface of silicone toys and increase the chance of bacteria growth.
- d. Instead, we can use water-based lubricants, such as glycerine or lubricating jellies.
 - [CLICK](#) to review options of the best lube for your sex life

Now that we've gotten the lowdown on protective measures to promote our sexual health, let's try to practice what's been preached.

Black women are the group most susceptible to the STIs we're about to give you the tea on, so study hard and practice safer sex even harder.

Think of the following glossary as a downloadable dictia-don't-you-do-it and wiki-you've-been-warned.

1. Chlamydia
 - a. Number one STI in the US
 - b. Black women are diagnosed with chlamydia at a rate **5.1 times higher** than white women
2. Herpes
 - a. Spread through skin-to-skin contact, more than 1 out of every 6 people aged 14-49 have genital herpes ([Upspoken Article](#)).
3. HIV
 - a. African-Americans account for almost half of all those with stage 4 HIV, or AIDS, who have died in the United States since the beginning of the epidemic.
 - i. To those of us snapping our necks while saying...What? Wait? Why? Listen up. In our community, late testing, plus stigmas around testing, plus lack of access to testing and healthcare (compared to our Caucasian counterparts) has led to a high level of infection amongst Black people. So let's test earlier, remove stigma from testing (it's another important part of our routine health regimen), and travel to them tests. No car? Call a friend, get a Lyft or taxi for a ride.
 - ii. CDC projects that approximately 1 in 48 Black women will receive a diagnosis of HIV during their lifetimes; compared to 1 in 880 for white women ([Source](#)).
 - b. In 2016, 4,560 Black women were diagnosed with HIV, compared to 1,450 white women (3.1x).
4. HPV
 - a. HPV is often symptom-less, which is why getting tested is critical ([Upspoken Article](#)).
 - b. Black women are less likely than white women to get vaccinated against HPV, yet are 70% more likely to have an abnormal Pap test--the screening for cervical cancer--than their white counterparts. Research shows that this is caused by a lack of awareness about HPV and the HPV vaccine in the Black community.
 - c. **Silver Fox Headline:** Some doctors doubt that having a Pap test benefits an older woman who has a history of normal test results. Others argue that older women experience body changes that make it difficult to obtain adequate cervical cell samples and therefore regular Pap tests should be mandatory for post-menopausal women. So err on the side of caution and ask your doctor for the test!

5. Syphilis

- a. Black women are diagnosed with syphilis at a rate **7 times higher** than white women.
 - i. Syphilis is an STI that can spread beyond your vagina...and into the brain. This level of infection can cause mental health issues such as depression and irritability.
 - ii. If syphilis goes untreated, the affected person is at risk of developing neurosyphilis. This is an infection of the nervous system, specifically of the brain and the spinal cord. Neurosyphilis is a life-threatening disease that can be passed to unborn children ([Source](#)).

6. Gonorrhea

- a. In 2017, women aged 15–19 years had the second highest rate of reported gonorrhea cases (557.4 cases per 100,000 females) compared with other age groups among women.
- b. Black women are diagnosed with gonorrhea at a rate **8.4 times higher** than white women.
- c. Having an STI, including gonorrhea, increases your risk of getting HIV ([Source](#)).
- d. If someone living with HIV also has gonorrhea, their the amount of the HIV virus in their system will increase, which will make them more likely to pass on HIV if they have [sex without a condom](#), even if they are taking HIV drugs ([antiretrovirals](#)) ([Source](#)).
- e. If you are taking [antiretrovirals](#) it is important to discuss with your doctor how treatment for gonorrhea may interact with your HIV drugs ([Source](#)).

7. Hepatitis

- a. If you're living with HIV and also have hepatitis B, the virus is likely to increase because your immune system is weaker. This will also make you more likely to pass on HIV if you have sex without a condom.
- b. If you're living with HIV, your healthcare professional should give you regular hepatitis B tests and regularly check your liver.
- c. If you're taking antiretrovirals, **it's important to discuss with your doctor how treatment for hepatitis B may interact with your HIV drugs.**

8. Silver Fox Specifics

- a. Age does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections. Our senior sisters who are sexually active may be at risk for infections such as syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydial infection, genital herpes, hepatitis B, genital warts, and trichomoniasis.
- b. Among people aged 50 and older, Blacks/African Americans accounted for 42% of all new HIV diagnoses in 2016. Whites accounted for 37%, Hispanics/Latinos accounted for 18%, and other races/ethnicities accounted for 4%.
- c. Infection rates for sexually transmitted diseases keep climbing among Americans 45 and older (regardless of race). This is part of a larger national trend that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says must be confronted. There were 82,938 cases of gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia

reported among Americans 45 and older last year, according to the CDC's sexually transmitted disease [surveillance report](#) for 2016.

Let's integrate these learnings into our regular girl talks. In addition to discussing family and friends, relationships and jobs, let's talk about sex when we do our check-ins. In addition to asking what he or she did when putting it down, ask what kind of protection they used so they can live their longest and healthiest life.

This information is the hottest tea right now amongst Black women, but we want STI awareness to be as shareable as the latest Shade Room or Essence content.

Upspoken created RoyalTea to help all generations of Black women in ways we simply couldn't do so before. So share this information with your daughters, your mothers, and even your grandmothers because again, age is NOT a vaccine against STIs, and many of us have aunts who are still putting it down.

EXERCISE:

Share this dictionary with at least three women in your village. Shoot, take it to the salon and share as great reading material while your hair is getting braided, twisted, or curled. Turn it into a pop quiz! Let's use this time to tend to our minds.

“Pleasure Principle”

Janet Jackson's “Pleasure Principle” wasn't just about her doing dance moves in a dark warehouse; it was about her taking control.

This hot sip is inviting us to embrace our freedom as women to make choices about our bodies without shame and define our sexual self-image. We can take action for what we want; even if we have to give it to ourselves.

The next section provides details on masturbation. Feel free to continue or move on to the next sip.

Did you know there are switches on our body that tell our brain to lower stress, feel happy, and relax more?

During an **orgasm**, the hormone oxytocin and chemicals called endorphins are released. Oxytocin released in the body lowers cortisol levels (aka the stress hormone), while endorphins have pain killing properties to alter your perception of pain. We basically have built-in Tylenol and happy pills released when we push specific buttons on our bodies.

Masturbation is a part of the pleasure principle; it's a way to get pleasure, avoid pain and satisfy our needs.

If interested in learning more, **see below** to discover how masturbation can benefit our wellness.

Health Benefits of Masturbation:

- Some of us have been taught that self-touching is wrong or something to be ashamed of. While we may have certain beliefs or values around self-pleasure, many of us are surprised to learn that masturbation actually has health benefits too. As always, it's your body, it's your choice. Since knowledge is power, here are a few facts to support your future decisions:
 - **Mood improvement:** Masturbation causes dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure, to be released into your body. Dopamine makes you feel good and puts you in a better mood ([Source](#)).
 - **Stress management:** During orgasm the hormone oxytocin and chemicals called endorphins are released. The release of oxytocin lowers cortisol levels, the main stress hormone, which is usually present in high levels in stressed out people. These endorphins also have pain killing properties and interact with the opiate receptors in your brain to alter your perception of pain. Touching yourself and climaxing can boost these chemicals, and help you feel more at peace.
 - **Immune support:** Masturbation can also improve your immune system by increasing cortisol levels, which can regulate immune functioning in small doses ([Source](#)). Touching yourself creates an inner glow that makes your skin glow (nature's Neutrogena)
 - **Sleep support:** Can't sleep? Masturbating will help you get those zzzs (and it's so much more fun than counting sheep)
 - **Vaginal tissue health:** Then according to Essence, masturbation helps keep your vaginal tissue healthy for your next orgasm and strengthens your bladder strength by increasing your vaginal muscles ([Source](#)).

“Me, Myself and I”

Sis, let's consider making the investment we make in others, in ourselves too.

We've sipped on how to tend to our vaginas, so let's continue to refresh ourselves with an education on how to tend to our bodies.

Below are a variety of self-care regimens that we can choose from based on our preferred taste.

1. Meditation

- a. Start the day with a quick meditation session.
- b. Let's try not to roll over and immediately scroll through our phones to review the latest work email and social media news. Instead let's roll over and find a quiet space where we can take deep breaths, get in tune with our spirit, then sync our mind and body before going into the day.



- To those of us who don't know how, there are numerous free meditation apps to try:
 - [Insight Timer](#)
 - Where To Find: [Apple Store](#) and [Google Play](#).
 - Calm
 - Where To Find: [Apple Store](#) and [Google Play](#).
 - [Enso](#) (for the experienced meditator)
 - Where To Find: [Apple Store](#)
 - Essence Recommended
 - [CLICK HERE](#)
- To those who would prefer to learn more first, check out “6 Ways to Help You Start Meditating,” Courtesy of Black Girl in Om's Lauren Ash ([Source](#)):
 - Don't Overthink it - Don't over intellectualize it. Put time towards finding a unique way to practice that's personalized to *you* can also de-mystify a task that can sometimes seem daunting.
 - Find Your Intention - Reflect on *why* exactly you're searching for a calming outlet. The reasoning will not only inform the type of meditation that could work for you—yes, there are different kinds—but it will help you be more in tune with your physical state.
 - Set a realistic goal, starting with meditating for two minutes a day - This may seem short, but we're talking about slowing down, quieting the mind, and going inward, so if you're new to meditation, two minutes is perfect.
 - Live in the Moment - Process and engage with the emotions that may follow meditation, instead of "putting pressure on yourself to better yourself.
 - If you find your mind racing, focus on your breath - Count your breaths to slow racing thoughts, focusing on fuller, longer exhales that then flow into steady inhales.
 - Make sure you're in a happy place - Environment is key to a well-rounded meditation practice, and you can find time and any location of your own that allows security.

2. Fresh Air

- a. Fresh air is good for the body and soul.
 - To those of us living in a home-to office-to home world, we can still get our vitamin D by taking a walk on our lunch break, or between meetings. We can get the other vitamin D when you get home :).

3. Social Eating

- a. Eating healthy is important, but so is breaking bread with friends.
 - To those of us eating breakfast in the car, then lunch at your desk, then dinner alone, get together with your girlfriends for a potluck dinner. Not only does this make dining fun and prevent the burden of any one person doing all the work, it also creates a public eating environment to keep us from overeating. Good friends tell their sisters when they can't grab another biscuit.

4. Social Exercising

- a. Physical fitness also supports our mental and sexual fitness. It's impossible to perform to our highest capabilities without strength and endurance, so breaking a sweat on the treadmill will support us when it's time to break a sweat in other areas of our lives.
 - To those of us who cringed at "treadmill," working out doesn't have to be solo or boring; try something new like dancing, walking, yoga, or even pilates. Black women bootcamps are popping up all over the place. We can get out of our comfort zones, get creative, and get some friends to join us! Just like social eating, making exercise social makes us accountable for committing to and finishing your work out. It also makes it fun. An afternoon bike ride has amplified enjoyment when we're with our squad.

EXERCISE:

Start a self-care enrichment plan by trying or increasing use of one of the provided self-care regimens in the next week. And if you're up for it, try another one the following week. Which one will you start with?

What about your friends?

Having an accountability partner will support our commitment to complete all the mental and physical exercises reviewed in this pot of RoyalTea.

And whether it's a commitment to visit our doctor for protection against infection – or the commitment to embrace a healthy sex life – let's designate an accountability partner who will help us reach our goals without judgment. This is someone who will lovingly hold us accountable and inspire us to be our best selves.

EXERCISE:

Put together a “grocery list” of all the attributes you need in an accountability partner such as strong, trustworthy, and makes me feel safe. Then go down the list and add the name of the friend(s) who come to mind when thinking of the qualities written down. The name that you see the most may be an ideal RoyalTea accountability partner. If you see several of the same names, you have an accountability RoyalTea Party.

Sip 4– **Our Squad, Our Village**

We know it's been a long ride, but we're in a great migration to becoming the greatest version of ourselves.



OUR SQUAD, OUR VILLAGE

Just like our ancestors moved North for better economic opportunities and to leave the hardships of the South, we too are moving up in the world by seeking better treatment and leaving high infection rates behind.

Up to this point, RoyalTea has hydrated us with tools for self-care and finding the right accountability partner to keep our care in check. The next person to recruit into your tea time crew is a medical professional.

And no sis, this isn't just us Googling the closest doctor to us; we wouldn't do that for a restaurant to get food or a salon to get our hair styled. In fact, many of us don't make any vendor decisions without testimonies from friends (and maybe an assist from Yelp).

So don't make a decision about a medical provider without the same investigation. Ask your friends and family, meet with medical professionals, and procure as many opinions as possible to determine who is the right fit for you. The questions you ask about your doctor today may be the answer to saving your life down the line.

Not sure where to start your investigation?

See below for clues to move you towards a doctor or “first aid friend” that’s right for you:

- [Black Doctor Physicians Directory](#)
- [CDC facilities with HIV Testing](#)
- [A Planned Parenthood near you](#)

Exercise:

Ask women in your circle for referrals, and if you want a place to start, here are 3 questions to ask:

1. Do you feel safe and comfortable having honest conversations with your doctor?
2. Would you recommend your doctor/nurse/clinic to a friend?
3. When was the last time you saw your doctor/nurse or went to your clinic?

So you’ve found the doctor, now it’s time to prepare for your appointment.

Prepare For Your Appointment

This means more than wearing clean underwear and socks because [studies](#) have shown that Black women are less likely to be trusted by doctors.

Don’t believe us? Just ask [Serena Williams](#).

Serena brought her tenacity from the tennis court, to the delivery room, to ensure her safety during childbirth. No doctor or nurse could convince her she was alright when her body told her something was wrong.

Black women, we have to be the champions of our well-being. We have to march into our doctor’s office like we’re the drum major for an HBCU band and our appointment is the half-time show. Blow the whistle to raise attention, questions, and awareness if you feel something isn’t right.

How many of us have felt something wrong but been scared to say it? (Raise of digital hands)

How many of us have expressed that something is wrong only to be told not to worry as it wasn’t a big deal? (Raise of even more digital hands)

Sis with the twists, you aren’t alone.


Sis with the press, you aren’t alone.

We aren't alone.

Doctor's appointments can intimidate and/or frustrate the best of us. It's not that we are weak. It's because really, who wants to admit or find out if anything is wrong?

Black women are often characterized as being outspoken, but we can afford to be more "Upspoken" when it comes to conversations with our doctor. None of us can afford to keep quiet in this scene.

Need a script? The cheat sheet below will have you feeling like you're Viola Davis interrogating a witness on "How To Get Away With Murder."

1. Practice setting boundaries; remember, our bodies are gardens and it's up to us to provide proper fencing. Let's learn the sexual history and testing status of the people we're intimate with to reduce the risk of infection.
2. Know the truth about how STIs are transmitted. We already know about sexual transmission from Chapter 2, but we're at risk of infection whether we are sexually active or not. For example...
 - a. HPV is not transmitted through bodily fluids, but rather through skin-to-skin contact ([HPV Upspoken Article](#)).
 - b. Many STIs are spread through contact with infected body fluids such as blood, vaginal fluids, or semen.
 - c. They can also be spread through contact with infected skin or mucous membranes, such as sores in the mouth.
 - d. STIs transmittance can also happen when sharing needles or syringes for drug use or beauty regimens such as ear piercing and tattooing, etc.
3. Know the available immunizations, vaccinations, and considerations for your care, just like you know the lyrics to your favorite Anita Baker or Cardi B songs.
 - a. HPV
 - i. The good news about HPV is that there's a vaccine, a vibranium  , that we can sip on ([Source](#)). There are more tips and sips in this [Upspoken article](#) too.
 - ii. Just like Michael B. Jordan was trying to get the vibranium in Black Panther, we can seek out this vaccine as it can protect us from some HPV types that lead to cancer and genital warts. In fact, 80% of cervical cancer cases and 90% of genital warts cases are caused by specific strains of HPV ([Source](#)), making this STI a bigger villain to combat than most of us realize.
 - iii. So now that we know to consider the vibranium that is the HPV vaccine, let's discuss its use. The vaccine is a series of 3 separate shots received over a span of 6 months. Everyone from 9 to 45 can get the HPV vaccine, so mothers take your daughters and sisters take your sisters. Shoot, take everybody. While it is recommended that we get the

vaccine before becoming sexually active, anyone 45 and under can consider it. If we haven't heard this mantra enough while sipping this tea, let us pour this thought one more time; it's never too late to utilize all the available tools to promote our sexual health.

- iv. It should also be noted that while HPV vaccines protect against cancer-causing strains of the virus found in the overall population, these are not necessarily the strains most likely to be found in Black women. Because of this, the HPV vaccine may not work as well to protect Black women against the virus and cervical cancer ([Source](#)). This being said, condoms plus vaccine are a great way to armor us from this STI.

b. Hepatitis

- i. We can call this section the good news channel as both Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B have vibranium-like vaccines too.

1. Hepatitis A

- a. The Hepatitis A vaccine is brewed with killed hepatitis A viruses that stimulates our body's immune system to produce antibodies against the virus. And sis, it works fast! For most vaccine recipients, the antibodies start to develop immediately after the first dose. But that doesn't mean you can put your guard down yet. The vaccine does not reach protective levels for 2 to 4 weeks. For maximum security, a second dose of the vaccine is recommended at least six months after the first, to provide prolonged protection" ([Source](#)).

2. Hepatitis B

- a. Think of the Hepatitis B vaccine as "vibranium plus" as it has reduced the number of new cases of hepatitis B by more than 75% in the United States. How does it do this? The Hepatitis B vaccine brew contains a protein (antigen) that stimulates the body to make protective antibodies. What's the tea on process? Examples of hepatitis B vaccines available in the United States include hepatitis B vaccine-injection ([Engerix-B](#) and [Recombivax-HB](#)). Three doses, taken at 0, 1, and 6 months, are necessary to assure full protection" ([Source](#)).

- ii. Vaccinations for HIV and Herpes (HSV) Yes, girl yes, they are in development.

4. Review which tests screen for which STIs and the CDC recommendations about testing frequency

- a. Each STI has its own test. STI testing may include ([Source](#)):

- i. HIV - A cheek swab where you rub the inside of your cheek with a soft swab.
- ii. Herpes - A physical exam where your nurse or doctor looks at your genital area to check for warts, sores, rashes, irritation, or discharge. Any sores are tested by taking a sample of fluid with a swab.

- iii. HPV - A swab of discharge or cell samples from your penis, vagina, urethra, cervix, anus, or throat.

Our RoyalTea power has encouraged us to have difficult discussions with friends, family, ourselves, and our accountability partners.

There's two more people for us to add to this discussion, and no, we're not adding them because we want to have our business on the street.

Our medical provider and sexual partner(s) are not exempt from the tough conversations we should have about our health to strengthen our care.

Let's put our Annalise Keating persona back on and **keep reading** to view another script for tough talks we need to have with your doctor and partner.

Medical Provider Tough Talk

Take 1

Medical Provider

Everything looks to be in working order. Any questions for me before I go?

You

No. [insert facial expression of you brewing up the confidence to speak your truth] Doc, I mean yes, yes I do have a question. Why is sex sometimes painful?

Medical Provider

It varies, there are multiple reasons, but a common cause of painful sex is not being properly lubricated. What kind of lubrication do you use?

You

Umm, whatever is next to the bed...if anything.

Medical Provider

Well, I ask because when your skin is dry, it increases the chance of vaginal tearing. So the right lubricant not only will feel more comfortable, but it will protect you from STIs. So why don't you try that and let me know if it doesn't get better. Let me see if I have any samples.

You

Okay that's great! One more question though, I read this RoyalTea guide and I know that some lubricants either have harmful ingredients or aren't good with certain kinds of condoms. Is there a toxin-free lubricant you suggest? Or since we use ____ type of condoms, what are the right lubricants to use?

Medical Provider
[Explains samples and suggests lubricants]

You
Thank you, I appreciate the information and will follow-up with any more questions.

Take 2

You
Doc, I have a new boo thang and need to discuss the various options to ensure that I am practicing safer sex.

Medical Provider
Okay, are you currently using birth control?

You
Yes, I'm taking the pill, but I know this only protects against pregnancy, not STIs. I know that as a Black woman, statistics show that I am more likely to contract STIs such as HIV, HPV, and Herpes. I want to be sure I do everything I can to prevent this.

Medical Provider
I can go ahead and test you for STIs. Here's a cup and the nurse will come back for your urine sample.

You
Okay, thank you that is great. However, from my research I know that this urine sample won't test for all of the STIs, but typically only chlamydia and gonorrhea. Can I also get a blood test to check for Herpes, Hepatitis, HIV, and Syphilis?

Medical Provider
Are you sure? I don't think that's necessary.

You
Yes, I'm sure. It's my body, and therefore my decision. I would also like to schedule a Pap Test to test for HPV.

Medical Provider
Well we only had you scheduled for a physical today, I'm sorry.

You

I thought a pap would be included in a physical, how is it possible to check me physically and exclude my vagina? If you are unwilling to do this today, will you please document your refusal on my medical chart?

Medical Provider leaves "for consultation" and re-enters the room.

Medical Provider

I went to check the schedule for the rest of the day, we can squeeze you in between patients but you'll have to wait for a bit. I'll send you down to the lab for a blood draw, here is the paper to take with you.

You

Thank you. I appreciate your help. Before I go, please walk me through the tests on this paper to confirm I am getting all the tests I've requested.

Take 3

Medical Provider

Okay we've completed your breast exam. Anything else you need today?

You

Yes, can I get an HIV test?

Medical Provider

I've been your doctor for over 20 years and you've never made that request. Anything I should know or be concerned about?

You

I'm not sure if we should be concerned, but that's why I'd like to get tested and know for sure. I read this RoyalTea sexual health and wellness guide to prepare for my appointment, see, here it says that 1 in 48 Black women will be diagnosed with HIV.

Medical Provider

Are you sure? For a woman in your position it might be a waste of time.

You

The guide cited the CDC and Black people my age and up accounted for 42% of new HIV cases in 2016! Plus it said women like me are usually diagnosed late stage - when it's too late to really do anything about it. I've been married for almost 25 years now and I'd like to be alive for 25 more. I'm sorry as I made the mistake of making this a question. I'd like to get tested today. It's important for me to know the status of my sexual health.

Medical Provider

Understood. Let me call the nurse and have her make an appointment for you in the lab.

You

Thank you.

Other “sips” that can be taken into the dialogue with our doctors are below:

1. In most cases, STI screening is NOT part of your normal health care, so be proactive and ask your doctor to be tested.
2. Do not assume that an STI panel will include all the tests you would like (be specific in asking your medical provider for exactly what you want).
3. For comprehensive STI testing, you may request the following tests:
 - a. Chlamydia
 - b. Gonorrhea
 - c. Syphilis
 - d. Herpes
 - e. HIV
4. Do not assume that your doctor is taking an HIV test because your blood has been drawn.
5. Ask your doctor to test you for HIV annually (even if you feel you are not at risk).

Now that we’ve nailed the questioning with our medical provider, let’s bring our next witness to the stand, your sexual partner.

Partner Tough Talk

Take 1

You

Hey Boo, can I talk to you?

[insert speechless, scared reaction from your mate]

You

I love having sex with you, so I’ve been learning how we can practice safer sexual practices. One of the tips in the RoyalTea guide I’m reading is getting tested for STIs together; once a year, even if we’re in a monogamous relationship. What do you think?

Partner

I don’t know what to think because I don’t know what STIs are. Can you school me?

You

Of course, STIs are sexually transmitted infections.

Partner

Wow, this escalated quickly. If you're asking because you think I'm sleeping with other people, I'm not. And you aren't either...right? Why do we need to get tested for if we are both monogamous?

You

Because if we care for each other, and want the best for each other, this is a part of keeping us healthy.

Partner

I really hadn't thought about it that way, but it makes sense.

You

It would really make me happy if we could do this together.

Partner

Oh it would make you happy, huh?

You

Yes, and it would also turn me on.

Partner

Shoot, let's get tested today.

You

Haha, sounds good.

Take 2

You

Babe listen, something's been on my mind... We've been dating for a while and we have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections. How do you feel about going to the doctor with me to get tested?

Partner

Where's all this coming from?

You

Well, we both have sexual experiences from past relationships that we've never talked about. So, it would be good for us to know our sexual histories, to keep each other healthy.

Partner

We've been together for years. Don't you think it's a little late for that? If I got it, you got it by now.

You

According to RoyalTea, it's never too late for us to know our status. If we're infection free, let's stay that way. If we have an infection, let's get treated. The RoyalTea guide had all these statistics about Black men and women learning about their STIs – because it went untreated so long it caused other issues.

Partner

I don't think I need to get tested, but feel free to do what you need to do.

You

This isn't just about you, it's about us. Beyond our sex life, it's important to me that I only move forward in relationships where health decisions are made to benefit us both. I'm not willing to continue like this.

Partner

It's not worth losing you over a test. If you make the appointments, I'll go.

Take 3

You

Have you ever been tested for sexually transmitted infections, like HIV, Chlamydia, herpes...?

Partner

Yea, I've been tested but it was a few years ago. Have you been tested?

You

It's been a while for me too. Since we're thinking about taking our relationship to the next level, I think it would be good for us to know where we both stand.

You

Since you've mentioned it, I think that's a good idea.

In addition to asking our partners about the tough questions about getting tested, below are more Qs to ask our mates to maintain our sexual health:

- How do you feel about abstinence?
 - Abstinence is the temporary or strict avoidance of all forms of sexual activity.
 - To those of us interested in making this choice, we need to have this conversation with our partner.
- Are you down for monogamy?
 - A mutually monogamous relationship where both people have been tested for STIs is generally considered to be one of low STI risk ([Source](#)).

- Trust is one of the most important things in a relationship--do you trust your partner?
- In a monogamous relationship, it's more comfortable to get tested for STIs together.
- What are your preferred sexual practices and boundaries?
 - Anal?
 - Are you a pain is pleasure type?
 - Dominatrix?
 - What type of lube do you prefer?
 - To have sex when on my period or abstain?
 - To those who think bloody sex is safer, you can actually still get pregnant when you're on your menstrual cycle. However, there are benefits such as:
 - Shorter, lighter and less painful periods
 - Reduced stress
 - Improved sleep
 - Improved immune system
- What drugs, if any, do you use or experiment with?
 - To those of us who are dating someone who is using drugs, evaluate the risk of infection, especially if they use needles.
- What's your STI history and current status?
 - If they don't know, or haven't been tested in the last 6-12 months, they should join you at your doctor's appointment.
 - On the other hand, if our partner shares that they have been tested recently, then we should ask to see their results.
 - We covered this in Chapter 2, but thought it was worth the stutter; knowing the HIV status of your sexual partner is well within your rights. To protect yourself, you can ask your sexual partner to get tested before becoming sexually intimate. To protect each other, make sure this dialogue is a two-way street.

EXERCISE:

Ask these tough questions to your medical provider during your next appointment and with your partner, tonight.

Sip 5– Our Journey

Congratulations ladies, we've come to the last sip of this pot of RoyalTea. Be proud of yourself, sis. You've earned it.



We've been through a great deal of tea to empower, pleasure, and protect our bodies.

As a final exercise, let's reflect on the tea we just sipped.

Your response to the material will not only support *your* growth, but *our* growth in brewing the next pot of RoyalTea for the sisters who have not yet pulled up to the table.

Kick-off your reflection journey **below**.

- What information resonated with you the most?
- What exercises did you most enjoy? Vow to make these tasks a part of your daily or weekly routine.
- Revisit your vows and add anything else that came to mind as you finished your tea.
- What women in your life do you want to share surprising or important information with? Do it!
- When are you going to share this surprising or important information (today, now, yesterday)?
- Is there something you want to spend more time on?

- What do you want to learn more about?
- Was any of the tea too hot?
- Was any of the tea too cold?
- What tea was just right for you?
- Last but not least, when and how are you going to celebrate the completion of your first pot of RoyalTea?

We've put together some RoyalTea Time ideas to help you start planning below:

- RoyalTea Party - Serve your favorite royal purple cocktails or mocktails, then sip and share RoyalTea stories.
- Girls Grille Session - Host a barbeque because sauce and sex talk work so well together.
- Melanated Sip and Paint - Grab your sisters and brushes to paint, sip, and share the latest RoyalTea.
- Black and Beautiful Day - Have a self-care day with manicures, pedicures, facials, or waxes (to get a better view of some of your parts) and discuss other methods being taken to take care of your body.
- Girls "Work" Out - Try a new exercise regimen like yoga, cycling, pilates.
- Eventbrite - Check your local events calendar for Women Empowerment events near you!

Final Sip (of this pot, but the next one is brewing)

RoyalTea isn't just for sipping; this powerful information is to be ingrained in your mind, reflected in your body, and shared with your village.

We want RoyalTea to be spread so much that it isn't tea anymore, but common knowledge in our community and embraced by our Black sisters.

We are powerful, Black women.

We're smart.

We're strong.

We're beautiful.

And with the work we're doing here, we're also going to be safer and healthier.

Thank you for bringing your power to this program and your willingness to pour this information into other women in your village.

[Insert illustration of large group of Black women sipping tea around a table. It's a small tea pot, but it has poured into everyone's cup to represent brand reach]

Upspoken