

## 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.

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 queens, 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 regular 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 [HERE](#).
  - 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, 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 aunties who are still putting it down.

### **EXERCISE:**

Share this information 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

- Start the day with a quick meditation session.
- 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 so *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.