

# Sexual Abstinence

## What is sexual abstinence?

Sexual abstinence is a choice to limit your sexual activity. Reasons for this choice may be moral, religious, or legal. Another reason may be your health and safety.

The meaning of sexual abstinence is different for different people. The most common meaning is not having sexual intercourse. This includes vaginal and anal intercourse. If you have a partner, discuss with your partner what abstinence means to you. This is especially important if you are starting a new relationship. Talk about what is OK for you and what isn't. Examples of what might be OK for you are holding hands, dancing, and kissing.

Your definition of abstinence may depend on why you are choosing to be abstinent. Your choice may be based on moral or ethical reasons. For example, you may believe that sexual intercourse is an expression of a lifetime commitment. In this case you and your partner will create your list of do's and don'ts according to your beliefs. If the goal is to avoid pregnancy, then you might agree that any sexual activity except intercourse is OK. You may choose abstinence because you want to avoid any sexually transmitted infections. This would mean that you will avoid any contact between genital areas, and between the mouth, genital, and anal areas.

## What are the advantages of sexual abstinence?

Many young people are saying no to sex before marriage. Choosing abstinence can be a statement of personal integrity and an expression of strong self-esteem.

Sexual abstinence may help you:

- Avoid painful emotional situations for which you may not be prepared.
- Avoid unwanted pregnancy.
- Avoid diseases.

## What else do I need to know?

You and your partner need to discuss and agree on what you mean by abstinence. You should also know how to avoid situations where it is easier to lose control. Examples of such situations are drinking alcohol or being alone with a possible sexual partner. Plan how you will get out of such a situation if it happens.

Some people feel that being prepared for safer sex—for example, having condoms on hand just in case you change your mind—means that you are not really planning to stay abstinent. Others feel that you should be prepared. This would mean that if you and your partner unexpectedly find yourselves giving up abstinence, you have condoms to protect against pregnancy and infection.

The choice of abstinence is a very important and very personal decision. Base your decision on what you believe is right for you. If you are unsure or decide

against abstinence, make sure you talk with your healthcare provider about ways to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

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