

# Abstinence

While abstinence may have different meanings for different people, in simple terms, abstinence is not having sexual intercourse. Being intimate without intercourse is a satisfying way to explore and learn about your and your partner's body without any sense of pressure to go further.

People choose to be abstinent for many reasons:

- Not being ready for sexual involvement
- Waiting for the right person
- Supporting personal or religious beliefs
- Focusing on school or career activities
- Avoiding the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

It is natural to go through periods in your life when you choose to be abstinent, whether you are in between relationships or you are currently in a relationship. The decision to have sex is your decision, each and every time, regardless of whether or not you've been sexually active in the past.

## EFFECTIVENESS

Abstinence is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. The effectiveness of abstinence in preventing sexually transmitted infections (also called sexually transmitted diseases) varies depending upon your definition of abstinence. It is possible to contract STIs during oral sex, so if you choose to engage in oral sex, use a barrier (i.e., condom, dental dam) to protect yourself from secretions that contain bacteria and viruses.

## CHOOSING TO BE ABSTINENT

Adapted from Princeton University's Sexuality Education, Counseling and Health website.

You need to think about what types of sexual intimacy you are comfortable with. It is important to make these decisions before you are in the heat of the moment because it can be hard to talk about your sexual limits when either partner is aroused. Consider your values and reasons for choosing abstinence, think about situations where it might be difficult to maintain abstinence, and consider how other people or substances like alcohol or other drugs might influence your decision.

*Use the following questions to help you make your decision about abstinence:*

- Do you feel comfortable with your present level of involvement with your partner?
- What are your reasons for choosing abstinence?
- Do you feel pressured to have sexual intercourse?
- What do you imagine as a possible result of having sex? How will you feel about yourself? How will you feel about your partner?
- Are you comfortable talking to your partner about your decisions?
- Can you discuss prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs)?
- Do you feel comfortable taking the responsibility to prevent pregnancy and STIs?
- Can you stand up to pressure? What might tempt you to have sex? Are you willing to avoid these situations to stick with your decision?
- What other ways will you find to be sexual (alone or with a partner)?

Once you have set your own sexual boundaries, talk with your partner about your decision and ask your partner about their boundaries. Abstinence works when both partners agree to it and maintain open communication. If your decision about abstinence changes, be honest with your partner and be sure to make your sexual decisions together.

## SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of gynecological and contraceptive services. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) or with one of the women's health nurse practitioners for gynecological care and to discuss contraceptive options. All visits to UHS are strictly confidential.

## LINKS

*For more information about abstinence, you can visit:*

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy  
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org/Default.asp?bhcp=1>

Advocates For Youth  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/>

Planned Parenthood  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/abstinence.html>