

ABSTINENCE

What Is It?

Abstinence is not having sex. When a person decides to practice abstinence, that means he or she has decided not to have sex.

How Does It Work?

Abstinence is the simplest form of birth control. If two people don't have sex, then sperm can't fertilize an egg and there's no possibility of a pregnancy. Other forms of birth control depend on barriers that prevent the sperm from reaching the egg (such as condoms or diaphragms) or they interfere with the menstrual cycle (as birth control pills do). With abstinence, no barriers or pills are necessary.

Do you have to be a virgin to practice abstinence? No. Sometimes, someone who has been having sex decides not to continue having sex. Even if a person has been having sex, he or she can still choose abstinence to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How Well Does It Work?

Abstinence is the only form of birth control that is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. Although many other methods can have high rates of success if used properly, they can fail occasionally. The rate of success of other birth control methods varies depending on the type of birth control. Practicing abstinence, however, ensures that a girl will not become pregnant because there is no opportunity for sperm to fertilize an egg.

Protection Against STDs

Abstinence protects people against STDs. Some STDs spread through oral-genital sex or even intimate skin-to-skin contact without actual penetration (genital warts and herpes can be spread this way). So only avoiding all types of intimate genital contact can prevent STDs. Avoiding all types of intimate genital contact is complete abstinence.

Only complete and consistent abstinence prevents pregnancy and protects against STDs. Because a person does not have any type of intimate sexual contact — including oral sex — when he or she practices complete abstinence, there is no risk of passing on a sexually transmitted infection.

Consistent abstinence means that the person practices abstinence *all the time*. Having sex even once means that the person risks getting an infection.

Abstinence does not prevent AIDS and hepatitis B infections that come from nonsexual activities like using contaminated needles for doing drugs, tattooing, or taking steroids.

How Do You Do It?

Not having sex may seem easy because it's not *doing* anything. But peer pressure and things you see on TV and in the movies can make the decision to practice abstinence more difficult. If it seems like everybody else is having sex, some teens may feel they have to do it, too, just to be accepted. Don't let kidding or pressure from friends, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, or even the media push you into something that's not right for you.

A couple can still have a relationship without having sex. The people who care about you should respect that deciding not to have sex is an important personal choice. You might not realize it, but most teens are not having sex.

Choosing to practice abstinence is an important decision, and you may have questions about making this choice or about other methods of birth control. Your doctor or nurse, or an adult you trust, such as a parent, teacher, or counselor — can help provide some answers.

Source: www.kidshealth.org