



Abstinence at a Glance

Abstinence is:

A behavior that prevents pregnancy
Prevents sexually transmitted infection
Safe, easy, and convenient

Is Abstinence Right for Me?

People are abstinent for many reasons, including to prevent pregnancy. Here are some of the most common questions we hear people ask about abstinence. We hope the answers help you decide if it is right for you.

What Is Abstinence?

You may have heard people talk about abstinence in different ways. Some people think of abstinence as not having vaginal intercourse. They may enjoy other kinds of sex play that don't lead to pregnancy. This is better described as outercourse. Some people define abstinence as not having vaginal intercourse when a woman might get pregnant. This is better described as periodic abstinence, which is one of the fertility awareness-based methods of birth control. And some people define abstinence as not having any kind of sex play with a partner. This is the definition we use on these pages. Being continuously abstinent is the only way to be absolutely sure that you won't have an unintended pregnancy or get a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

How Effective Is Abstinence?

Used continuously, abstinence is 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. It also prevents STDs.

What Are the Benefits of Abstinence?

Abstinence has no medical or hormonal side effects and it's free. Women and men abstain from sex play for many reasons — even after they've been sexually active. A couple may even choose to be abstinent after having had sex play with each other. The reasons people choose to be abstinent may change throughout life.

People chose abstinence to:

Prevent pregnancy
Prevent STDs
Wait until they're ready for a sexual relationship
Wait to find the right partner
Have fun with romantic partners without sexual involvement
Focus on school, career, or extracurricular activities
Support personal, moral, or religious beliefs and values
Get over a breakup heal from the death of a partner
Follow medical advice during an illness or infection

Any woman or man can abstain from sex play. Many do so at various times in their lives. Some choose to abstain from sex play for long periods in their lives.

Special Advantages for Teens

Sexual relationships present risks. Abstinence is a very good way to postpone taking those risks until you are better able to handle them. Women who abstain until their 20s — and who have fewer partners in their lifetimes - may have certain health advantages over women who do not. They are less likely to get STDs. Because they are less likely to get an STD, they are also less likely to become infertile or develop cervical cancer.



Abstinence at a Glance (Continued)

What Are the Disadvantages of Abstinence?

There are few disadvantages to abstinence. People may find it difficult to abstain for long periods of time and may end their period of abstinence without being prepared to protect themselves against pregnancy or infection.

Information from: PlannedParenthood.org