Abstinence

What is abstinence?
Abstinence means different things to different people. It may mean making the choice not to have any sexual contact including:
• self-touch (masturbation)
• direct touching of your partner’s genitals
• vaginal sex (penis to vagina)
• anal sex (penis to anus)
• oral sex (mouth to anus or genitals)

For some people, abstinence may include certain types of sexual contact.

How well does abstinence work at preventing pregnancy and STIs?
• If you are having sex and no method of birth control is used, there’s about an 85% chance of getting pregnant after 1 year.
• You can’t get pregnant if you are abstinent (no genital contact). You can get pregnant if sperm is near the opening of the vagina.
• You can’t get STIs if you don’t have skin to skin contact or pass body fluids between partner(s).

Why choose abstinence?
People may choose abstinence:
• if not ready or don’t want to have sex
• to prevent pregnancy
• to prevent STIs and HIV
• as a short term form of birth control (e.g. waiting to start another method)
• for other personal reasons
• for medical reasons

How can I be abstinent?
• You can choose to be abstinent at any time, even if you’ve had sex before.
• Set your sexual limits and think about what sexual activities you are okay with. Talk with your partner(s) about your choices and limits.
What are the benefits of abstinence?
The benefits of abstinence (no genital contact) include:
• no risk of pregnancy
• no risk of STIs and HIV
• always available

What are the disadvantages of abstinence?
• It might be hard to stay abstinent for some people. Alcohol, cannabis and other drugs can affect how you think and make decisions.
• Consider having a plan for safer sexual practices including condoms and birth control.
• Think about getting emergency contraception as soon as possible to help prevent pregnancy if birth control wasn’t used.

Did You Know
• You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
• You can plan ahead and talk to your partner(s) about how to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
• You can consider getting regular testing for STIs and HIV. Talk to your health care provider.
• Many clinics offer low or no cost birth control.

To find a clinic near you visit ahs.ca/srh
For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.

Websites
• ahs.ca/srh
• myhealth.alberta.ca
• ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca
• teachingsexualhealth.ca
• sexandu.ca

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, please speak with your doctor or appropriate health care provider.