

# 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](http://ahs.ca/srh)
- [ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca](http://ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca)
- [teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://teachingsexualhealth.ca)
- [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [sexandu.ca](http://sexandu.ca)

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