

Abstinence

What is abstinence?

Abstinence means choosing not to do something. It can mean different things to different people. In this handout, abstinence means choosing not to have sex, and includes not engaging in:

- direct touching of partners' genitals
- vaginal sex (penis to vagina)
- anal sex (penis to anus)
- oral sex (mouth to penis, anus, or vulva/vagina)

How well does abstinence work at preventing pregnancy and STIs?

- You can't get pregnant if you are abstinent from vaginal sex (no genital contact between a penis and vagina). There is a chance of pregnancy if sperm is near the opening of the vagina.
- The only sure way to prevent STIs and HIV is to abstain from any activity that involves sexual contact between one person's body and another person's genital area, semen, vaginal fluid, or blood.

Why choose abstinence?

People may choose abstinence:

- if they're not ready or don't want to have sex
- to prevent pregnancy
- to prevent STIs and HIV
- as a short-term type of birth control (e.g., while waiting to start another method)
- for religious, cultural, or personal reasons
- for health reasons

How can I be abstinent?

- You can choose to be abstinent at any time, even if you've had sex before.
- Think about what sexual activities you want to do, and don't want to do. Talk with your partner(s) about your choices and limits.
- Consider how alcohol, cannabis and other drugs can affect how you make decisions about sex.
- It's a good idea to have a plan for safer sexual practices, including condoms and birth control, in case you decide to have sex.
- If you have vaginal sex without birth control, think about getting **emergency contraception** as soon as possible to help prevent pregnancy.

What are the benefits of abstinence?

- There is no risk of pregnancy.
- There is no risk of STIs and HIV.
- It is free and doesn't require hormones or medical devices.

What are the disadvantages of abstinence?

- Many people find it hard to remain abstinent for a long time.
- Choosing abstinence does not mean that your desire for sex goes away.

Did you know?

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom/barrier every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- You can lower your risk of HIV by taking an HIV prevention pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.



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