

# Abstinence

## **How abstinence works:**

People define abstinence in many different ways. We define total sexual abstinence as not currently engaging in anal, oral or vaginal intercourse or having any genital-to-genital contact. Total sexual abstinence is 100% effective against both pregnancy and STDs when used consistently.

## **How to use abstinence:**

Decide how you want to define abstinence for yourself. Make this decision when you feel clearheaded, sober and good about yourself. If you have a partner, talk about this decision together. Decide in advance what sexual activities you will say “yes” to and those you will not. Avoid high-pressure sexual situations.

Avoid using drugs and/or alcohol. Learn more about birth control and safer sex practices so that if you change your mind, you can be prepared.

Emergency contraception is available as a back-up. Abstinence is a choice people can use at any time and at any age.

GENERAL REFERENCE: Contraceptive Technology: 18th Rev. Ed., 2004

## **Effectiveness:**

Abstinence is very effective protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). When both partners are completely committed and practice abstinence (no genital contact) 100% of the time, it is 100% effective. Typically, however, 1-9 out of 100 women get pregnant in a year while practicing abstinence, because they are not abstinent all of the time.

## **Some benefits of abstinence:**

Abstinence is free and available to all, at any time. Abstinence can encourage people to build relationships in many ways other than sex.

## **Potential disadvantages of abstinence:**

A person may choose to use abstinence and then change his or her mind in the “heat of the moment.” It is important to have another method of birth control available for pregnancy and infection protection. intercourse

## **Ask about:**

If you have unprotected sex unexpectedly, ask a doctor, a health provider, or a pharmacist about Emergency Contraception (EC), or call 1-888-NOT-2-LATE for more information.

## **Potential risks:**

No health risks.

## **Center for Health Training**

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