

# Abstinence

## What is abstinence?

- Abstinence means different things to different people.
- Abstinence can mean not having any physical contact.
- Abstinence can also mean having some physical contact but no sexual activity that involves the genitals (e.g., masturbation, sexual intercourse).
- To be abstinent, you and your partner have to set some limits. These limits are different for everyone.

## Does it work?

- You can't get pregnant or get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) if you are abstinent (with no genital contact). This is because there is no close contact with the genital area or body fluids.
- You can get pregnant without having sexual intercourse if sperm is near the opening of the vagina. You can get some STIs by touching the genital area of your partner.

## Why be abstinent?

- People are abstinent for many reasons:
  - personal values
  - family values
  - religious beliefs
  - cultural beliefs
  - to prevent unplanned pregnancy
  - to prevent STIs
  - not being ready to have a sexual relationship
- A choice to be abstinent means you have to be able to say no. Think about how you will handle situations.
- Abstinence can be positive in a relationship. Some people might go through times when they choose to stop having sexual intercourse.
- A couple might choose to be abstinent if:
  - they do not want to get pregnant
  - one of them has a disease/infection that can be passed on to their partner
  - one of them cannot have sex because of health problems

## Do I have to be a virgin to be abstinent?

- A person who is abstinent is not always a virgin. A virgin is someone who has never had sexual intercourse. Someone who is abstinent might have had sexual intercourse before, but is not having sex right now. The choice to be abstinent can be made at any time.
- Being abstinent does not mean you stop being sexual, it means that you decide how to be affectionate.

## How can I be abstinent without close contact?

- Some activities you can do are:
  - dance or exercise
  - be with friends
  - read a book
  - give or get a hug
  - watch a movie
  - cook dinner and dine by candlelight
  - meditate

## How can I be abstinent with some close contact?

- Some activities you can do are:
  - slow dance with your partner
  - give or get kisses
  - give or get a massage
  - cuddle with your partner
- If you are thinking about having sexual intercourse, talk to your healthcare provider about preventing pregnancy and STI.

## Sexual Decision Making

- Choose to have sex or not—you have the right to make that decision.
- Choose to protect yourself from getting pregnant and STIs.
- Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STIs.
- Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

## For More Information Call:

### Sexual and Reproductive Health

Education/Health Promotion                      403-955-6515

### Clinical Services

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre	5 <sup>th</sup> floor, 1213–4 <sup>th</sup> St SW	403-955-6500
South Calgary Health Centre	31 Sunpark Plaza SE	403-943-9510
Sunridge Professional Building	406, 2675–36 <sup>th</sup> St NE	403-944-7666

## Website

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth)

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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