

Sexual Health

ABSTINENCE



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Sexual abstinence means different things to different people. To some it means not having any sex which could mean abstaining from any or all of the following:

- Vaginal sex
- Anal sex
- Oral sex
- Skin to skin contact including genital touching

It can be a life choice or just a temporary decision. You could choose to abstain after having been sexually active for some time. You could simply be taking a break!

Why choose abstinence?

- **It is the best protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).**
- **Abstinence is a choice that everyone is entitled to make.**
- **It is consistent with religious and moral beliefs.**
- **You may not feel ready for sex or sexual activity.**

How will I know if I am not ready for sex?

There are many ways to know if you are not ready to have sex with your partner:

- You have not found the right partner
- You are unsure about your partner
- You are not sure about your relationship
- You feel you are being pressured into having sex
- You are not comfortable talking to your partner about sex

In any of these cases, abstinence may be the best decision.

Are there ways to express affection without sex?

If you are with someone you really care about, anything can be fun. There are many ways to show a person that you care about them, such as:

- Spending time with them
- Going to the movies
- Holding hands
- Hugging
- Sharing fantasies (sexual or non-sexual)

Remember...

Abstinence is your choice. It is the only 100% effective method to prevent STIs and pregnancies. If you have been sexually active and now abstinent, STI testing is needed to ensure you are healthy.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.