

For Teens: Deciding About Sex



Making the decision to have sex is a complex choice. In school and around friends, you may be feeling pressure about it. But before you make a decision to have sex, make sure you think about what's at risk.

Your health risks

Sex can be risky for your health. When you have sex with someone, you're in contact with possible germs from their past or current sexual partners. This may include a sexually transmitted infection (STI), including HIV. In many cases, you can't tell if someone has an STI unless they tell you. And they may not know they have one. Latex condoms and dental dams can only lower these risks, not fully prevent them.

The risk of pregnancy

No birth control gives 100% protection against pregnancy, even when used correctly. Having a baby is a big commitment. It will change your life. Raising a child can cost hundreds of dollars a month. You may be legally responsible to financially support the child for 18 years. This may be the case even if you and your sexual partner don't get married. To pay for this support, you'll likely need to work instead of or in addition to going to college.

Thoughts vs. reality

Does this sound familiar?

- "If I don't tell the person I want to have sex, they'll think I don't like them."
- "I would know if my partner had an STI."
- "Having sex just once won't cause a pregnancy."

But this is closer to reality:

- "I liked the person, but they broke up with me because I kept trying to talk them into sex."
- "I never knew my partner had an STI, so now I'm infected, too."
- "My partner or I got pregnant after sex just one time. I never thought it would happen."

Talking it out

Before you make a decision, talk with a trusted adult or healthcare provider about your thoughts. They can help you figure out the best choice for you. They can help you learn how to stay safe with condoms and other protection if you do have sex.

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