

ABSTINENCE

What is it? Abstinence is a decision to not have sex (vaginal, oral, or anal).

How does it work? Abstinence works because sex, which enables sperm to fertilize an egg, does not occur.

How is it used? An individual makes a decision not to have sex and sticks to it. Assertiveness, negotiation, and planning skills help an individual remain abstinent.

Does it reduce the risk for HIV/AIDS and STDs?

Abstinence from vaginal, oral and anal sex eliminates the risk for sexually transmitting or contracting HIV/AIDS and STDs. Abstinence from vaginal sex *only* does not reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS and STDs if other types of sex (such as oral and anal sex) occur.

What are its main advantages? Abstinence has no health risks or side effects. It can be used at any time, regardless of prior sexual experience. It allows users to focus on nonsexual aspects of relationships. And it supports the values of some individuals, families, and religious groups.

What are some possible problems?

Abstinence may be hard to stick with. It requires learning and using decision-making, negotiation, and planning skills. People practicing abstinence should know about other methods of birth control to be prepared for the future.

Reference: DHHS, *Office of Population Services*

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