Abstinence

How abstinence works

People define abstinence in many different ways. Sexual abstinence for pregnancy prevention (birth control) and STI prevention is defined as not having anal, oral or vaginal intercourse or having any genital-to-genital contact. Total sexual abstinence is most effective against both pregnancy and STIs when used consistently.

How to use abstinence

Make decisions about abstinence 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, since that may influence your sexual decisions and increase your risk. Learn more about birth control and safer sex practices so that if you change your mind, you can be protected. Emergency contraception is available if you have sex when you did not expect to. Abstinence is a choice people can use at any time and at any age.

CARDEA
Training, Organizational Development and Research

www.cardeaservices.org

Revised 2012

(continued)

Effectiveness

When used consistently, total abstinence is very effective protection against pregnancy, HIV (AIDS) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, herpes, genital warts (HPV), hepatitis B and syphilis. When both partners are completely committed and practice abstinence (no genital contact) 100% of the time, it is 100% effective.

Abstinence is most effective when both partners talk and agree about their reasons to remain abstinent.

Benefits of abstinence

Abstinence is free and available to anyone, at any time. Abstinence can encourage people to communicate about their sexual decisions and build relationships in many ways other than sex.

Potential disadvantages of abstinence

You may choose to use abstinence and then change your mind in the "heat of the moment." It is important to have another method of birth control available for pregnancy and STI/HIV infection protection.

Ask about

If you have unprotected sex unexpectedly, ask a health provider, or a pharmacist about Emergency Contraception (EC). For more information call the national toll-free hotline (1-888-NOT-2-LATE) or visit the website www.not-2-late.com.

Potential risks

No health risks.

GENERAL REFERENCE: Contraceptive Technology (CT):
20th Rev. Ed., 2011 and CT Update (monthly newsletter).