

making healthy decisions about sex



Are you thinking about having sex? Is anyone trying to talk you into having sex? Does it seem like all your friends are having sex?

Before you make any decisions, or even if you already have had sex but are unsure if you should again, read on for some important information about how to stay healthy. (And remember, if anyone has ever forced you to have sex, this is **WRONG** and not your fault! Tell someone you trust as soon as possible.)

It's OK to say NO!

Not everyone is having sex. Half of all teens say “no” to sex. There’s nothing wrong if you decide to wait. If you decide to wait, stick with your decision. Plan ahead how you are going to say “no” so that you are clearly understood. Stay away from situations that can lead to sex. Too many young people have sex without meaning to when they drink alcohol or use drugs. Not using alcohol and drugs will help you make clearer choices about sex. If you decide to have sex, it’s important that you know the facts about birth control, diseases, and emotions.

Why wait?

- Sex can lead to pregnancy. Are you ready to be pregnant or become a teen parent? It’s a huge responsibility—will your baby have food, clothes, and a safe place to live?
- Sex has health risks. You could become infected with one or more sexually transmitted infections (STIs), like herpes, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, syphilis, or HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). One type of disease, called human papillomavirus (HPV), may cause cancer.
- You may feel sad or angry if you let someone pressure you into having sex when you’re not really ready.
- You also may feel sad or angry if you chose to have sex and then your partner leaves you. Your partner may even tell other people that you had sex with him or her. Can you handle that?

If you don't want to get an STI, use condoms

If you’re going to have sex, using condoms is the best way to avoid getting STIs. Remember that nothing will ever be 100% effective in preventing diseases except abstinence (no sex). Use a latex condom every time you have sex—no matter what other type of birth control you and your partner also might use. To protect against getting a disease from having oral sex, use a condom, a dental dam, or non-microwavable plastic wrap. Your pediatrician can explain all these things to you. To make sure you stay healthy, get regular medical checkups, urine testing for STIs, and a pelvic exam (if you’re female).

Condoms are easy to use. They work best when you use them the right way. Here is *what you need to know*.

- **Use only latex or polyurethane condoms.** You also have a choice between a male condom or female condom. Never use these 2 types of condoms at the same time; they might tear. When buying male condoms, get the kind with a reservoir (nipple) at the tip to catch semen.
- **Follow the instructions** on the package to make sure you are using them the right way. Also, check the expiration date on the package. Don’t buy or use expired condoms.
- **You can carry condoms with you at all times**, but do not store them where they will get hot (like in the glove compartment of a car). Heat can damage the condom. Also, you can carry them in a purse or wallet, but not for too long—this shortens their life.

If you don't want to get pregnant...

You need a reliable form of birth control!

- **Condoms** used the right way have a 90% chance of preventing pregnancy.
- **“The pill”** is the most popular type of birth control used by women. There are many brands of the birth control pill. For the pill to work, a woman must take it every day. When used correctly, the pill is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.
- **The birth control patch** is similar to the pill and looks like an adhesive strip. The patch is placed on the skin and changed every week for 3 weeks. Side effects are similar to the pill.
- **Depo-Provera** is a shot that you get every 3 months. It is a popular choice for women who have trouble remembering to take the pill.

There may be minor side effects when using the pill, patch, or Depo-Provera, like mild irregular bleeding, nausea, sore breasts, or weight gain. Your pediatrician will talk with you in detail about what to expect.

Other types of birth control

The following are **NOT recommended** for young people:

- **Withdrawal** (when the male “pulls out” before he ejaculates or “cums”) does not prevent pregnancy or STIs. Even a small amount of sperm can lead to pregnancy or an STI.
- **Norplant.** It’s no longer approved.
- **Diaphragms and spermicides.** These require some planning. The teen pregnancy rate using these methods is very high.
- The **“rhythm method.”** This is when you avoid having sex during certain times of your monthly cycle. This method is not very effective at preventing pregnancy.
- The **intrauterine device (IUD)**, unless you have had a baby and are at a low risk for STIs.

It's your choice!

The decision to become sexually active is yours. Choosing not to have sex is the *only* way to avoid all STIs and getting pregnant.

Talk with your pediatrician about birth control—how safe and effective these methods are, what side effects they can cause, and how much they cost.

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From your doctor

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