

IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT, DO IT RIGHT!

Sexual Decision-Making



At some point in our lives, we are all faced with the question, “To be or not to be sexually active?” Regardless of your answer, it is most important that you are confident in your decision, aware of sexual consequences, and aware of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). If you are confident in your decision and truly understand all possible consequences of being sexually active, you’ll be more prepared to handle situations as they arise. Making a healthy sexual decision can dramatically change or save your life.

A healthy sexual decision involves more than just saying no or yes. It involves your body, your health, and your emotions. If you decide to have sex, realize that it is a lifelong decision. The implications of sex don’t depend on whether or not you keep in touch with that person. Whether good or bad, consequences come with every action. Before making your decision make sure it’s the right person, that you are mentally and emotionally prepared for the rise and possible fall, and that you are making the decision to have sex for yourself and not for the other person. Remember that relationships come and go. Think about how you would feel if the relationship ended the day after you had sex, or how you would feel if after a casual encounter you were treated as if you didn’t exist.

Listed below are some questions to think about before you make your decision:

- *Am I compromising my values or beliefs?* Your values and beliefs may come from your upbringing; they may be based on your religious or spiritual outlooks, or a combination of both.



- ***Does my partner have any STDs?*** When thinking about having sex with another individual, openly discussing STDs should not be an issue. You are thinking of you and your partner's safety. If you don't feel comfortable discussing STDs with your partner, rethink the situation.
- ***Do I know enough about my partner (last name, age, sexual history)?*** How many people has your partner been with? How many of those partners has he or she had unsafe sex with? These are things to think about before engaging in sex with anyone.
- ***Do I care about this person?*** Caring about someone means more than just being attracted to the physical part of them. Do you trust the individual? Do you share similar interests and hold the same values? If an unplanned pregnancy occurs are you both ready to accept responsibility for your actions?
- ***Have I discussed the consequences of sex with my partner (pregnancy, STD's)?*** Discussing the consequences of sex with your partner will ensure that you are both aware and informed individuals.
- ***When I make my decision, are drugs or alcohol involved?*** In order to avoid regrets 3 minutes later or the next morning, make a clear and conscious decision about having sex. If you can't make a decision free of drugs or alcohol, reconsider sex.

If you choose to have sex, there are things that you'll have to think about after the fact. Will you become more sexually active? Will you abstain from sex? Will you be monogamous (being sexually active with only one person)? Is your partner having sex with you only? The questions and concerns are never ending.

Let's talk about a few consequences and ways to prevent them. Did you know that 1 in 4 people in a room currently have or have been at one time infected with a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)? That cute guy or girl sitting next to you in class could be infected with an STD. In fact, some people contract STDs without knowing it! STDs are now most common among people ages 25 and younger. That being said, it's obvious that individuals should take precautions to protect themselves against STDs. Be informed and get tested!

A way to lower the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies is through practicing safer sex:

- Be responsible



- Don't have more than one sex partner at a time
- Talk with your partner about the possibility of having a family
- Talk with your partner about STDs before beginning a sexual relationship
- Use contraceptives (birth control does not prevent the contraction of STDs)
- Avoid contact with genital sores
- Prevent fluid exchange (blood, semen, vaginal secretion)
- Learn how to use condoms
- Use condoms whenever you have sex

Although the list above will help lower the risk of contracting STDs, abstinence is the safest way to prevent their transmission. Abstaining from sex doesn't mean you're a prude; it means that you're waiting until the right time in your life. If you decide not to have sex until a certain age, time frames, or marriage, avoid being intimidated by others. Many people who have sex at one point or another wish they'd waited. Some people feel that because they haven't upheld their own values, no one should. Being physically, emotionally, and mentally ready to have sex is based on the individuals making the decision, not your friends or partners.

You're probably reading this and thinking "Okay, so tell me something I don't know. I learned this in high school." Many people obviously do not realize the significance of the information learned because sexually transmitted diseases are still spreading tremendously among young adults, unplanned pregnancies are becoming more common, and sex is often considered as merely an activity. Think about what sex means to you before you make your healthy decision.

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