

HIV fast facts : abstinence / written by Brian Adams ; illustrations by Ian Akin.

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HIV *fast facts*

Abstinence



About HIV and AIDS

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It lives in blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk. To get HIV, one of these infected fluids has to get inside your body.
- The main way people get HIV is by having unprotected sex (without a condom) with someone who has HIV.
- People can also get HIV by sharing needles with someone who has it, or by being born to a mother who has it.
- You can't tell by looking whether someone has HIV. So the best way to keep from getting HIV from sex is to not have sex. This is called *abstinence*.
- Abstinence means choosing not to have sex for now. This means vaginal, anal or oral sex.



Why Wait?

There are a lot of good reasons to wait to have sex. Any reason you choose is a good reason.

Reasons to Wait

- You may not be sure you're with the right person.
- You may wonder if you're really in love.
- You may not feel ready.

If You Wait...

- You *won't* have to worry about getting HIV from having sex.
- You *won't* have to worry about getting any other STD (sexually transmitted disease).
- You *won't* have to worry about getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant.

Other Advantages

- Your relationship may get even stronger because you and your partner can get to know each other without the pressure of sex.
- You feel good about yourself because you're sticking with what feels right to you.

What About Pressure?

- Let's get one thing clear: *Not* everyone is "doin' it." They may talk about it. They may think about it. But many people of all ages are choosing not to have sex.
- Pressure from the media, society and friends can be hard to resist. But the media, society and friends don't have to live with the results of *your* choices about sex—like possibly getting HIV.
- Pressure from someone you're going out with can be the hardest. "You would if you loved me" and other dumb lines can come from lots of people. Even a person you like or love.
- Anyone who truly cares about you won't pressure you to have sex if you don't want to. Sex should never be a test of love.

Can We Still Be Close?

Abstinence doesn't mean you can't be close. There are plenty of ways to make each other feel good without having intercourse—and without putting yourself at risk for HIV.

Some of these ways are

- Listening, giving support and having fun together.
- Dry kissing, hugging or holding hands. (Wet kissing is safe as long as neither person has sores or cuts in or on the mouth.)

Saying no to sex can mean saying yes to a relationship based on respect, romance, caring and concern.

Talk About It

If you're going out with someone, sooner or later the question of sex will probably come up. Talking about sex can seem hard or even scary at first.

You may worry about hurting your partner's feelings. You may worry your partner will think you don't like him or her. You may worry that your partner will stop liking you. It may even seem easier to just *have* sex than to *talk* about it!

But talking can help protect you both. It can also bring you and your partner closer. If you can talk about sex, you can probably talk about anything.

How to Talk

The best time to explain your decision to abstain is before you get intimate. It can be hard to think clearly (let alone talk) in the middle of heavy kissing!

Explain your decision and talk about your feelings. Listen to how your partner feels. You may need to reassure him or her that you care. Keep explaining why not having sex right now is the best choice for you.

Get Support

Finding people who support your choice not to have sex can help you feel strong about your decision. It can make it easier to stick with it.

- Some people find that talking with friends can help. You might be surprised to find that your friends are dealing with the same thing.
- Brothers, sisters, counselors and parents can give good advice as you work things out.

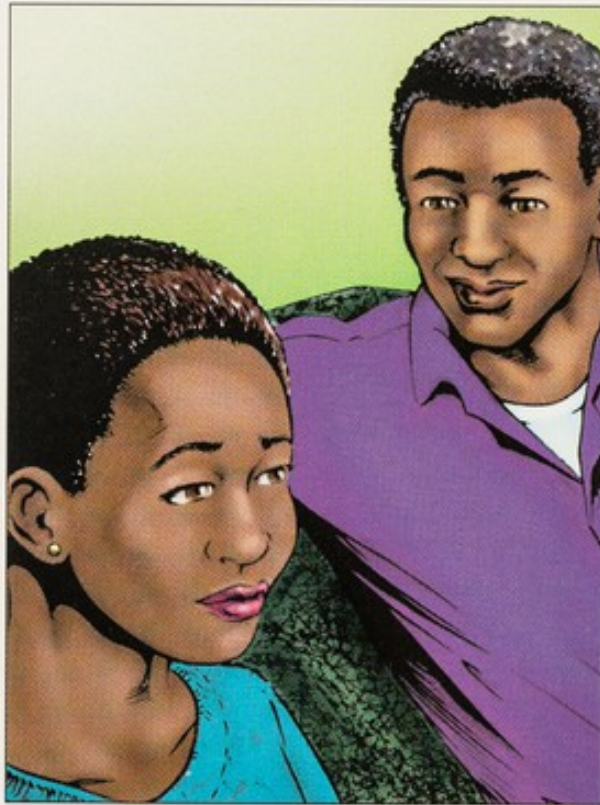
Alcohol & Other Drugs

One thing that will not help is using alcohol or other drugs. Being drunk or high can make it much more difficult to stick with your choice not to have sex.

Play It Smart

There is no second chance with HIV. If you get HIV you will have it forever. Abstinence is the only 100% sure way to protect yourself.

You are in control of your body and your life. Only you can make the choices that are right for you. There are a lot of good reasons to make abstinence one of your choices.



For more information, contact your state or local health department, family planning organization or HIV/AIDS agency. Or call one of these toll-free numbers:

**The CDC National STD and AIDS
Hotline**

(800) 342-AIDS (or 342-2437)

Spanish: (800) 344-SIDA (or 344-7432)

Deaf access: (800) 243-7889 (TTD/TTY)

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