

HEALTH MATTERS

Abstinence and Outercourse

What are abstinence and outercourse?

Abstinence generally means not having vaginal sex. Some people who practice abstinence also avoid other types of sexual intimacy.

Outercourse is sex play that does not include vaginal sex.

How effective are abstinence and outercourse?

If you use one of these methods all of the time, it is unlikely that you will get pregnant.

Some people find it hard to use these methods long term. During outercourse, semen may come into contact with your vagina. If this happens or if you have unplanned vaginal sex, it is possible to get pregnant.

How do they work?

When used perfectly, both abstinence and outercourse keep sperm out of the vagina. They work best when you and your partner agree to use these methods.

There are many ways for you to enjoy being sexual without having vaginal sex, including:

- Kissing
- Masturbation
- Rubbing
- Acting out fantasies
- Using sex toys
- Oral sex
- Anal sex

Sharing sex toys, oral sex, and anal sex will not cause pregnancy but can pass sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can use condoms or other latex barriers to lower the risk of spreading STIs.

What are the benefits of using abstinence and outercourse?

- Both abstinence and outercourse are free, always available, and have no side effects.
- These methods can help prevent STIs. It is unlikely that you will get an STI if the penis does not come into contact with your vagina, anus, or mouth and if no body fluids are shared by the partners.

What are the downsides of using abstinence and outercourse?

- To prevent pregnancy and STIs, you must use abstinence or outercourse all of the time.
- Partners may have a hard time abstaining from sex for a long period of time.

- It is possible that semen may get into the vagina during outercourse.
- Sometimes, people who plan to abstain or use outercourse have sex anyway. In this case, you may not have another form of birth control ready to use.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on abstinence and outercourse, talk to your health care provider.

Compare abstinence and outercourse to other birth control options using ARHP's Method Match at www.arhp.org/MethodMatch.