



Birth Control Methods

Teens and sex can be a risky combination. Find out how to talk to your teens about abstinence and contraception.

By Mayo Clinic staff

Few parents want to face the idea that their teens are having sex — but research shows that many teens are sexually active by high school, potentially putting themselves at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). When it comes to teens and sex, the key is discussing the importance of contraception before sexual activity begins.

Promoting abstinence

When broaching the topic of teens and sex, it's never too late to talk about abstinence. Whether you feel strongly that sex before marriage is wrong or you simply want your teen to postpone sex until he or she is more mature, explain your feelings to your teen. If you share the reasons behind your beliefs, your teen may be more likely to understand and adopt your values.

Also ask your teen to think about his or her own values and hopes for the future — and consider how sex might affect them. Explain that teens and sex can be a risky combination. The only sure way to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes and HIV is to practice abstinence from sex — oral, vaginal and anal. Abstinence can also save your teen some emotional stress if his or her relationship ends. Remind your teen that there are many nonsexual ways he or she can show feelings for someone.

Discussing birth control options

Understanding birth control methods is an important life skill for everyone. Whether your teen decides to have sex or wait, make sure your teen knows how to prevent pregnancy and protect himself or herself from sexually transmitted infections.

Discuss with your teen:

- **Condoms.** Consistent and correct use of condoms is the most effective way for sexually active teens to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections. Condoms also help prevent pregnancy. Make sure your teen understands the importance of always using condoms during sex.
- **Prescription birth control.** Various prescription contraceptives — such as combination birth control pills, the contraceptive patch (Ortho Evra), vaginal ring (NuvaRing) and contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera) — can help prevent teen pregnancy. Your teen will need to see a doctor to get a prescription for these types of contraceptives. Explain to your teen that the doctor will review her medical history, conduct a pelvic exam, and go over the risks and benefits of different types of birth control. For instance, Depo-Provera isn't recommended for young teens because it may affect bone mass. Make sure your teen understands that prescription birth control isn't a replacement for condoms. Prescription birth control helps prevent pregnancy, but doesn't offer protection from sexually transmitted infections.
- **Emergency birth control.** Explain to your teen that it's always a good idea to make a decision about birth control before having sex. However, emergency contraception — such as the morning-after pill (Plan B One-Step or Next Choice) — can help prevent pregnancy if your teen doesn't plan ahead or contraception fails. Plan B One-Step



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and Next Choice are available over-the-counter at most pharmacies for those age 17 or older and by prescription for those age 16 or younger. Make sure your teen understands that Plan B One-Step and Next Choice must be used within 72 hours of unprotected sex to be effective.

- Natural family planning. If use of contraception goes against your values, you might consider talking to your teen about natural family planning, which involves abstaining from sex during a woman's most fertile days. Keep in mind, however, that natural family planning methods aren't as effective as prescription birth control and don't offer protection from sexually transmitted infections. In addition, effective use of natural family planning methods requires diligence and planning — and teen sex is often unplanned. Teen girls also commonly have irregular menstrual cycles, which can make it difficult to assess fertility signs.

Don't be afraid that talking to your teen about contraception will encourage him or her to have sex. Your teen is likely curious about sex and contraception, whether or not you bring up the topic. By being open and honest, you can help your teen make informed decisions and act more responsibly when he or she decides to have sex — whether it's now or years in the future.

If you're having trouble talking to your teen about contraception, ask your teen's doctor for help. He or she may offer advice on how to talk to your teen and accurately answer questions about contraception.

Encouraging responsible behavior

Teens may lack the maturity to properly and consistently use certain types of contraception. If your daughter is thinking about using prescription birth control, make sure she considers frequency of use and convenience before selecting a method. For instance, combination birth control pills need to be taken at the same time every day, while NuvaRing is worn for three weeks at a time. Whatever birth control method your teen chooses, explain the importance of keeping track of doctor's appointments and how to make birth control use a part of her routine — such as by taking her daily combination birth control pill when she brushes her teeth. Make sure your teen knows what to do if she misses a dose or suspects that she may be pregnant.

If your teen is considering becoming sexually active, you might also provide practical tips — such as keeping condoms in a wallet or purse. Explain to your teen that use of alcohol and other drugs may affect his or her judgment and increase the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

The bottom line

Talking about sex and contraception with your teen isn't easy. However, your guidance can help your teen make informed choices that help protect his or her sexual health.

Information from: [MayoClinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org)