



Healthy Choices **CAN** Reduce Your Risks

As a teenager, you will be faced with many choices and decisions during your adolescent years. Making healthy choices and decisions can greatly reduce your health risks. Young people who choose to become sexually active increase their risk of getting pregnant or acquiring a **Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)** such as genital herpes or the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**.

Teenage Pregnancy

A pregnancy can greatly impact a young person's life. Many young girls that become pregnant face the reality that caring for a baby and continuing to go to school can be very difficult. These young women



are often faced with putting their baby up for adoption or having to depend on other family members to help care for their child. You will learn more about the hardships faced by teen parents on page 5.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases – STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are transmitted through sexual contact with someone who is infected. Some types of STDs can be caught by touching an infected area of someone's body and then touching your own genitals.

There are several different types of STDs. Each causes a variety of symptoms and must be treated by a doctor. Some of the most common STDs include:

- Gonorrhea
- Chlamydia
- Syphilis
- Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

Untreated STDs can damage your reproductive organs, lead to cancer, and even be fatal. Some viruses, such as genital herpes and HIV, can be managed with medications but will remain in the body forever.

HIV/AIDS

One of the most devastating STDs is the **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** and the later onset of **Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**.



There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, and although the condition can be managed with medications, eventually a person's immune system will succumb to the disease, causing major health complications such as pneumonia and even death. HIV is passed through sexual fluids or the blood of an infected person. HIV is usually acquired by having sexual intercourse with an infected person or by sharing needles that are used to inject drugs into an infected person. Babies can also be born with HIV infection if their mother has the infection.

Making the HEALTHIEST DECISION



A young person can prevent getting pregnant or acquiring an STD by making the decision to be abstinent. **Abstinence** is defined as consistently abstaining from all sexual activity until marriage. Abstinence is the only prevention measure a young person can take that is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy and STDs. You will learn more about abstinence on page 6.

Discussion Questions

Do you think adolescents your age understand the importance of making healthy choices? Why or why not?

How could peer pressure affect an adolescent in terms of his/her choice to engage or not engage in sexual activity?

Activities

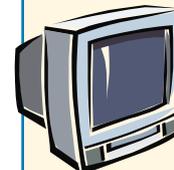
1. In groups, discuss how adolescents that choose to be sexually active might be affected. Consider all aspects of this situation including the physical, emotional, and financial impact on the teenagers and their parents. Share these consequences with the other groups.

2. In groups, develop a list of refusal statements or strategies you would use if you were ever approached or pressured to have sex.

3. Individually or in groups, create a slide presentation, poster, or pamphlet that promotes the benefits of abstaining from sexual activity. Share your project with your classmates.



4. How do television shows, commercials, movies, or magazine advertisements promote or discourage sexual activity? Share some examples with your classmates.



5. In your journal, describe the choices or decisions you regularly make to stay healthy.



Home Connection Discuss with your parents the consequences associated with sexual activity. How can family support help you make healthy choices? How would a pregnancy during your teenage years affect your family? Place this information in your health portfolio.

