

SEXUAL PROMISCUITY

- *Almost everyone I know is having sex, so how can I resist the pressure to have sex before marriage?*
- *Are the statistics on sexually transmitted diseases really true? Is it possible to catch a disease if both you and your sex partner are clean and healthy?*
- *What are the risks of being infected by STDs or HIV/AIDS if I practice safe sex?*
- *What are the spiritual considerations of the decision to have sex outside of marriage?*

Do you have all the facts?

Having sex before marriage is a gamble you cannot afford to take. No one playing this game ever expects to lose, but many do! You only have to read the daily newspapers to confirm the numbers. It is estimated that 2.2 million Kenyans are now living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, but few people know if they are infected, or do they show outward symptoms of the disease. (Ministry of Health, 2001)

Note: Please be aware that some of the following pages contain information that may not be suitable for young children. An effort has been made to present this information in the most sensitive yet factual way possible.

Q. Almost everyone I know is having sex, so how can I resist the pressure to have sex before marriage?

A. Today, the pressure to have sex before marriage is overwhelming. Much of the pressure comes from the media where music videos and television present to young people an imaginary world where actions have no negative or lasting consequences. Contemporary youth culture also conveys the idea that ‘everybody’s doing it’. Young people face a lot of pressure from their friends to have sex before marriage. Often the main reason they have sex before marriage is because they fear losing their peers’ acceptance if they refuse to have sex.

The desire to wait for marriage before having sex is admirable and it may come as a surprise to some that this is the desire of a significant number of teenagers and young adults. There are plenty of single adults who are holding off on sex until the time is right. Results from a recent questionnaire returned by 90 students at a public university in Nairobi reveal that 47.8% of the respondents were still sexually pure. This is a marked contrast to the belief held that *all* university students are “*doing it.*” In another national survey of Kenya’s church youth, 62% of the youth interviewed indicated that they preferred to wait until marriage to have sex. (MAP International, 1996) Saying ‘no’ to sex before marriage can be tough. To help you with this challenge, here are a few practical suggestions to help you keep your resolve.

1. Establish your principles regarding sex and marriage before you begin dating. Decide *before* the date, *before* the relationship gets serious, *before* your partner asks you to ‘prove your love’, that sex begins on the wedding night and *not earlier*. Keep your reasons clearly in mind. You are waiting because you desire to enjoy sex fully, without fear and secrecy, without risking serious disease and unplanned pregnancy. Saying ‘no’ to sex before marriage will enable you to build a stable, enjoyable marriage...with no regrets or past mistakes to hide. Once you have established firm principles and values on which to base your behavior, it will become easy to reject or avoid anything that would put your values in danger.

Saying ‘no’ to sex early in life will help you achieve many of your other priorities in life. For example, while you are in school you will be free to concentrate on your studies and eventually establish a career without the unnecessary delay caused by sickness or unplanned pregnancy.

2. Avoid situations that will increase the risk of an accident. Remember that sexual feelings gain momentum just like a car rolling down a steep hill. It is so much easier to put on the brakes in a “level” public place than when you are alone in your partner’s house.

Counselors suggest that you avoid places where provocative music is played that arouse one's sexual desires. In addition to avoiding enticing situations, keep your mind away from sexually oriented films, videos, books and magazines. Whatever you fill your mind with will eventually overflow and become an action. If you want to remain pure, feed your mind on that which is pure. (*Philippians 4:8*)

3. Make sure that close friends are people who will help in life and not harm you. Choose friends who share your values in life and who have the courage to stand up and to be different. In this way, you can help each other to be better people. God made men and women to be friends. At the right time, this friendship may develop and blossom into a relationship of love and possibly marriage. In the meantime, patiently learn each other's character as you interact in group activities together. Someone has suggested that a good friend is someone you don't mind introducing to your parents or grandparents!

You will know if your friendship is healthy and good if your friendship encourages you to be a better person. Your friendship will be healthy if you are always increasing in your respect for each another. You do not need sexual involvement to be friends. If someone really loved you, they would not demand that you compromise your principles. True love is willing to wait for marriage before expressing that love to the fullest. Such love is not based on feelings alone, but on commitment. True love involves commitment. Wait for true love.

Q. Are the statistics on sexually transmitted diseases really true? Is it possible to catch a disease if both you and your sex partner are clean and healthy?

A. Yes, most of the statistics about sexually transmitted diseases are true. It is estimated that by the year 2005, there will be 571,000 HIV positive Kenyans, between the ages of 15 and 24! Right now, there are 2.2 million Kenyans who are living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, but few know whether they are infected or show outward symptoms of the disease. (Ministry of Health, 2001) One out of six people in Nairobi are HIV positive, and AIDS patients occupy over 60% of all hospital beds in Kenya. (MAP International, 1996)

Yes, it is very possible to catch a sexually transmitted disease (STD) even if you both appear to be healthy and clean. In the past, most teens and young adults worried about broken dreams, lost reputations and unintended pregnancies when they engaged in sex outside of marriage. Today, sexually active teens are at great risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including the deadly AIDS virus for which there is no cure. The following information will give a better view of the risks involved in being sexually active outside of marriage.

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are infections that can be transferred from one person to another through sexual contact. Adolescents and young adults (ages 15-24) are the age groups at the greatest risk for acquiring STDs.

Some STDs are treatable. However, even the once easily cured STD called gonorrhea has become resistant to many of the earlier antibiotics. Other STDs, such as herpes, AIDS, and genital warts, all of which are caused by viruses, have no cure. Some of these infections are very uncomfortable, while others can be deadly. Syphilis, AIDS, genital warts, herpes, hepatitis, and even gonorrhea have all been known to cause death.

Many STDs can lead to related conditions such as pelvic inflammatory disease, cervical cancer and complications in pregnancy. Therefore, education about these diseases and prevention is important.

At present, health management professionals in Kenya are classifying and treating STDs by their symptoms. This system divides STDs into three main groups as follows: (MAP International, 1996)

1. STDs that cause genital ulcers: These STDs include syphilis, herpes, chancroids and less commonly, lymphogranuloma.

2. STDs that cause vaginal discharge: These STDs include gonorrhea, trichomonas, Chlamydia infection and thrush. (While thrush can be transmitted sexually, it can also occur for other reasons.)

3. STDs that cause genital discharge in males. These STDs include gonorrhea and Chlamydia infection.

A more detailed description of the most common sexually transmitted diseases is provided below:

Chlamydia: Chlamydia is a very dangerous STD because it usually has no symptoms; 75% of infected women and

25% of infected men show no symptoms at all. *Type:* Bacterial *Modes of Transmission:* Vaginal and anal sex. *Symptoms:* Symptoms may include abnormal genital discharge, and burning during urination in both men and women. Women may also experience lower abdominal pain or discomfort during intercourse. Men may experience swelling or pain in the testicles. *Treatment:* Infection can be cured with antibiotics. However, it cannot undo the damage done prior to treatment. *Possible Consequences for the Infected Person:* If untreated, up to 30% of infected women will experience pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which in turn often leads to ectopic pregnancy, infertility, and chronic pelvic pain. In men, if untreated, Chlamydia can cause epididymitis, an inflammation of a testicle (where sperm are stored), which may result in sterility. Infected individuals are at greater risk of contracting HIV, if exposed to the virus. *Prevention:* Abstaining from vaginal and anal sex with an infected person is the only 100% effective means of prevention. Latex condoms can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of contracting the disease.

Gonorrhea: Gonorrhea is a very frequently reported STD. If not treated, it can cause sterility. *Type:* Bacterial *Modes of Transmission:* Vaginal, anal or oral sex. *Symptoms:* Though some cases may be asymptomatic, (lacking symptoms) when symptoms do appear, they are often mild and usually appear within 2-10 days after exposure. The symptoms include discharge from the penis, vagina, or rectum and burning or itching during urination. *Treatment:* Infection can be cured with antibiotics; however, treatment cannot undo the damage done prior to treatment. *Possible Consequences for the Infected Person:* Untreated in women, the disease is a major cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can lead to ectopic pregnancy, infertility, and chronic pelvic pain. It can cause sterility in men. Untreated gonorrhea can infect the joints, heart valves and/or the brain. *Prevention:* Abstaining from vaginal, anal and oral sex with an infected person is the only 100% effective means of prevention. Latex condoms can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of contracting the disease during sex.

Genital Herpes (HSV-2): Genital Herpes (HSV-2) is painful and episodic. It can be treated, but there is no cure. *Type:* Viral infection. *Modes of Transmission:* Herpes is spread by direct sexual skin-to-skin contact with the infected site during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Another strain of the virus, Herpes Simplex Type 1 (HSV-1) is most commonly spread by nonsexual contact and usually causes sores on the lips. However, HSV-1 can also be transmitted through oral sex and can cause genital infections. *Symptoms:* Symptoms are often very mild and may include an itching or burning sensation; pain in the legs, buttocks or genital area; or vaginal discharge. Blisters or painful open sores may appear, usually in the genital area, buttocks, anus, and thighs, although they can erupt anywhere. Sores heal after several weeks but may recur. *Treatment:* There is no known cure. An anti-viral drug is usually effective in reducing the frequency and duration of HSV-2 outbreaks. *Possible Consequences for the Infected Person:* An infected person with sores has an increased risk that exposure to HIV will lead to infection. The sores provide an entry point for the AIDS virus. *Prevention:* Abstaining from vaginal, anal and oral sex with an infected person is the only 100% effective means of preventing the sexual transmission of genital herpes. Latex condoms can reduce but not eliminate the risk of contracting the disease during sex. However, it is still possible to contract genital herpes, even though using a condom, via sores in the genital area.

HIV/AIDS: HIV/AIDS was first recognized in 1984. AIDS in Africa is becoming a leading cause of death among young men and women. The virus is fatal involving a long, painful death. *Type:* Viral *Modes of Transmission:* Vaginal, oral and especially anal sex; infected blood or blood products; sharing drug needles with an infected person; and from infected mother to infant in utero, or during birth. *Symptoms:* Some people experience no symptoms when first infected. Others have flu-like symptoms including fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue and enlarged lymph nodes. The symptoms usually disappear within a week to a month, and the virus can remain dormant for years. However, it continues to weaken the immune system, leaving the individual increasingly unable to fight opportunistic infections. *Treatment:* There is no known cure. Antiviral drugs are used to prolong the life and health of the infected person. Other treatments are used to combat opportunistic infections.

Possible Consequences for the Infected Person: Virtually everyone who becomes infected with HIV will eventually develop AIDS and die of AIDS-related complications. *Prevention:* Abstaining from sex with an infected person is the only 100% effective means of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV. Latex condoms can reduce but not eliminate the risk of contracting the disease during sex.

Syphilis: Syphilis is an infection caused by small organisms, which can spread throughout the body. *Type:* Bacterial. *Modes of Transmission:* Through unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex — and also through kissing if there is a lesion on the mouth. *Symptoms:* The first sign is usually a sore called *chancre*. It appears two to five weeks (on the penis) after sexual contact with a person who has syphilis. The chancre may look like a pimple, a blister, or an open sore. It usually appears in the genital area of the man or woman and commonly on the lips, fingers, anus or mouth. The sore only lasts a few days and then goes away by itself without treatment, but the disease continues spreading through the body. Weeks or months later, there may be a sore throat, mild fever, mouth sores, swollen joints, or

painful rashes all over the body, ring-shaped welt (like hives) an itchy rash on the hands or feet. All these signs usually go away and the person often thinks he is well, but the disease continues. *Possible Consequences for the Infected Person:* Increased risk of HIV infection. If syphilis is left untreated, the symptoms will disappear, but the germ will remain within the body and progress into the third stage, which may seriously damage the brain, heart, and nervous system, and possibly cause death. It can also seriously harm a developing fetus during pregnancy. *Treatment:* Antibiotic treatment can cure the disease if it's caught early, but medication can't undo damage the disease has already done. Both partners must be treated at the same time. *Prevention:* Abstaining from sex with an infected person is the best protection. To avoid infection have sex with one faithful partner.

Trichomoniasis ('Trich'): Trichomoniasis is a parasitic infection of the genital area. Approximately five million people get it every year. *Type:* Parasitic *Modes of transmission:* Through unprotected vaginal intercourse. *Symptom:* A thin and foamy, greenish-yellow or whitish, foul smelling discharge with itching, usually within four days to one month after exposure to the parasite. Men may notice a discharge from the penis. It may burn to urinate and sometimes the genitals hurt or are swollen. The discharge may contain blood. *Possible consequences for the infected person:* It can cause premature labor in pregnant women, and increased risk of HIV infection. Also, it's common for this infection to occur again and again. *Treatment:* Antibiotics can cure the infection. Both partners need to be treated at the same time to prevent passing the infection back and forth and both partners need to abstain from intercourse until the infection is gone. *Prevention:* Abstain from sex with an infected person.

Despite the epidemic of heartaches and horrors from STDs, it seems that few people are willing to accept the obvious. These diseases could be avoided completely if uninfected people would postpone sex, find and marry one partner, and remain mutually faithful for life.

If you or someone you know has a STD you should do the following:

1. Get proper treatment as soon as possible.
2. Contact your sexual partner or partners and encourage them to get the same treatments whether they have the symptoms or not. It is quite possible to have the infections without symptoms.
3. Both the person with the STD and his or her sexual partner should be counseled and encouraged to have a HIV test.
4. Until an STD is treated and healed (no more discharge, the ulcers healed, and any other symptom resolved), a person with an STD should refrain from sexual intercourse or at least use a condom properly. This will reduce the likelihood of spreading the STD and also reduce the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

In summary, although these ways of reducing the spread of STDs are important, they are not 100% sure because a significant number of STD infections are symptom-less and, therefore, go unnoticed and untreated. The only sure way of preventing STDs is to follow God's design for sex; abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage.

Q. What are the risks of being infected by STDs or HIV/AIDS if I practice safe sex?

A. There is really no such thing as 'safe' sex. The only truly 'safe sex' is either total abstinence or sex in marriage. That is, sex in the context of a monogamous marriage relationship, where neither party is infected with a STD, is considered 'safe'.

When people talk about 'safe sex' they usually mean taking the following three precautions:

- 1. Limiting the number of partners with whom one has sex.*** The idea is that if you have fewer partners, you have fewer chances for exposure to disease. The problem, however, is the fact that one does not need many sexual partners to contract a disease. A lethal disease can be transmitted by a single sexual contact with one infected partner.
- 2. Knowing something about a partner's sexual history.*** Once you have your partner's history, you need to make a choice not to have sex with someone who has had many partners. The problem is that you do not know whether you are going to get the whole story of your prospective partner's sex life, especially if he or she has something to hide.

How are you going to find out the sexual history of your prospective partner? It is hard in African societies to

discuss sexual matters. Imagine the challenge of trying to interview your partner about his or her former sex life in the middle of a passionate date! Remember that from an infectious disease standpoint, you not only have sex with the person at hand, but with all of their sexual contacts, and all of their contacts' contacts! This shows that you need a lot of information about your partner in order to make sure you are safe!

3. Use a condom at all times, consistently and correctly. This is another safeguard suggestion to help you have 'safe sex.' If you are gambling, this may be your best bet for reducing your risks. However, there are two main problems with this suggestion.

First, although many young people are aware that condoms made of latex (a rubber product) can reduce their chances of contracting HIV and other STDs, they do not use condoms. A survey conducted among church youth in Kenya revealed that only 3 out of 10 sexually active youth (ages 12–24) use condoms. (MAP International, 1996)

Second, many young people and adults do not use condoms *consistently* and *correctly*, even with education and high motivation. Using a condom *consistently* means using a condom 'with each act of intercourse' and using it from 'start to finish'. Using a condom *correctly* involves at least 10 criteria:

- Use only a latex condom, never a condom made from sheepskin or other material.
- Be sure the expiration date on the condom has not passed.
- Check to be sure the condom is not brittle or discolored (a dark brown). This is a sign that either heat or time has destroyed the latex fibers.
- Keep condoms in a cool place, out of direct sunlight. A man's wallet or a car glove compartment is an unacceptable place.
- Use a new latex condom for each act of sexual intercourse.
- Never use petroleum jelly such as Vaseline or cooking fat on the condom to lubricate. This will break down the fiber of the condom. Use water-based lubricants like glycerin or KY Jelly, found at the chemists.
- The condom should be opened carefully from the packet, taking care not to rip the condom with sharp fingernails.
- Put on the condom as soon as erection occurs and before any sexual contact.
- The penis must be erect and the condom applied over the firm penis. Hold the tip of the condom while unrolling it onto place, leaving space at the end of the condom, yet ensuring that no air is trapped in the condom's tip. Then unroll the condom carefully all the way to the end of the penis.
- After the man has had sex with his partner, he should withdraw immediately after ejaculation, holding the condom firmly to keep it from slipping off. He must remove the condom being careful not to spill the semen.

Did you notice how much is involved for *consistent* and *correct* condom use? Obviously, the process and the product are not fool proof, which means there is always the chance of a deadly virus passing from one partner to another even with the use of a condom. Deciding if that's a risk you are willing to take is a major part of the decision to have sexual intercourse, and perfectly illustrates the reason God says saving sex for marriage is the best way. He loves us and wants to protect us from harmful choices. The only true safe sex is abstinence. By choosing abstinence now, no matter what your previous experience has been, you are choosing life. Choose life. *Make a difference!*

Q. What are the spiritual considerations of the decision to have sex outside of marriage?

A. Sex before marriage breaks God's command. (*Ephesians 5:3*) (*Galatians 5:19*) The ultimate rule for all people regarding sex is that it should be reserved for marriage, with complete faithfulness to only one partner. If you are not married, total abstinence from sex is the rule. (*I Thessalonians 4:3-6*) This is difficult and contrary to human instinct, but like any desire, guidelines are provided to optimize fulfillment of that desire. Ignoring the rules leads to an unhealthy life and a corruption of the sexual desire. In marriage, sex can be enjoyed, explored and nurtured without guilt, without negotiating and without fear of negative physical, emotional or spiritual consequences. Sex between married couples is a good thing!

God created you and knows what is best for you. He is concerned about how you use your body. (*I Corinthians 6:18-20*) (*Genesis 1:27, 31*) (*Psalms 139:14*) (*I Corinthians 6:13b*). God created sexual intimacy to be enjoyed within the safe boundaries of a publicly-declared, life-long commitment of marriage. (*Hebrews 13:4*) (*I Corinthians 7:4*) (*Proverbs 5:15-18*) God clearly presents serious consequences for those who choose to ignore this truth. (*I Corinthians 10:8*) (*Colossians 3:5, 6*) God's plan does not spoil our lives but brings fulfillment and happiness. God wants us to enjoy a healthy life in a beautiful family environment. We sometimes think that He is fencing us in and denying us pleasure. The truth, however, is that He is protecting us from danger.

Before you hastily agree to have sex with anyone, ask yourself, "What are the possible consequences?" First, you

could get pregnant. Many women are getting pregnant when they don't intend to, forcing them to make difficult decisions about how to deal with an unexpected child. Don't fool yourself; the consequences of pregnancy will permanently change your life.

Second, sex before marriage could expose you to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Due to this ever present danger, churches in Kenya are strongly advising that before any person gets married, that they go for HIV testing. Why gamble with your life? A lethal disease can be transmitted by a single sexual contact with one infected partner.

Third, sex before marriage exposes you to spiritual and emotional trauma. Sex is not just a physical union. It involves your soul, your emotions and your personality. When you have sex, you are creating a powerful bond between you and your sexual partner. You are giving away a very intimate part of who you are. When your sexual partner is not committed to you in marriage, you risk abuse, emotional pain and guilt. Abstinence preserves sexual intimacy, and the powerful bond it creates, for the commitment of marriage.

Sex is a special gift from God. It is the only comprehensive and totally sure protection against potential physical, emotional and spiritual damage. Sex performed outside of marriage leaves physical and spiritual scars. When sex is done in a loving and responsible way within the safe boundaries of the permanent relationship of marriage, it is good. It is a beautiful and powerful expression of love between husband and wife. It is definitely worth the wait!

Make a Difference

Using sex as a game or for recreation has serious consequences. It does not guarantee an ongoing relationship with the one you love. It does not guarantee security in the relationship. It does not guarantee a family. And, if you acquire a disease, it can rob you of the ability to have children later when you want to have them. When you have sex outside of marriage, you are literally risking your life and future.

God is the designer of sex. More than risking diseases or pregnancy, sex before marriage is sin and often causes deep emotional scars that linger into marriage. God has provided guidelines for sexual intimacy and with whom we should have sexual intimacy. This is not because sex is bad. No, it is because sex is such a powerful, intense force within us that it should be handled with the greatest of care.

For girls who become sexually active before marriage, it is not uncommon for them to feel guilt, thinking that 'everybody knows' and as a result they struggle with their own shame. 'Everyone' may not know, but God does know and He can, and will, forgive and forget if you come to Him!

For those who fail to remain sexually pure until marriage, or who fail while *in* a marriage, there is hope. God is willing to forgive and allow healing. It takes confession, repentance and a desire to start anew, but it is possible!

Those few moments of pleasure are not worth a lifetime of misery. Make a wise choice today. *Make a difference!*

Resources

Amani Counseling Centre and Training Institute. *Help at hand* [Brochure]. P.O. Box 41738 Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: 254-2-602672/3 or 254-722-626590. E-mail: accti@africaonline.co.ke

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Gem Counseling Services. [Brochure]. P. O. Box 44128, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-729922.

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Lifespring Counseling Centre. [Brochure]. P.O. Box 42905 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-723237.
E-mail: june@africaonline.co.ke

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Oasis Counseling Centre and Training Institute. *Guided to the springs of living water (Revelations 7:17)* [Brochure].
P.O. Box 76117 Ufungamano House, 5th Floor Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-715023/721157/726494.
E-mail: oasiscc@maf.or.ke

Sex and Singles: Why wait until marriage? [Brochure]. Gichinga, E: Author.

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The Nairobi Women's Hospital. Commitment to Women's healthcare.

Dr. Sam Thenya, Chief Executive.

Hurlingham Medicare Plaza, Arwings Khodek Road, P.O.Box 10552-00100, Nairobi, KENYA, cell:0722-520858,
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Christian Medical Fellowship, P.O Box 20954 Nairobi 00202 Tel: 2710768 or Email: admin@cmfkenya.org or
Website: www.cmfkenya.org (Back)

Dr. (Mrs.) Jean W. Kagia of Protecting Life Movement Tel: 342844/5 or Email: kagia@africaonline.co.ke (Back)

Crisis Pregnancy Ministries (Kenya), Ngumo Estate, Nairobi near Kenyatta Market, on your way to Little Friend
School, Hse. No. 249. P.O. Box 66633, Nairobi 00800, Tel: 254-2-4445997,
E-mail: cpmk@yfcafrica.org (Back)

Family Life Counseling Association. P.O. Box 18077 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-558926/544640.

Gem Counseling Services. P. O. Box 44128, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-729922.

Lifespring Counseling Centre. P.O. Box 42905 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-723237.
E-mail: june@africaonline.co.ke

Oasis Counseling Centre and Training Institute. P.O. Box 76117 Ufungamano House, 5th Floor Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: 254-2-715023/721157/726494. E-mail: oasiscc@maf.or.ke

Wholistic Caring and Counseling Centre. P.O. Box 975 Ruiru, Kenya. Tel: 254-722-73931.

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