

Sex is a universal human desire. We are all motivated by different reasons for having sex, but sex can dramatically change your life for the better or worse. As much as our culture wants to down play the seriousness of sex, you know the truth; there are always strings attached. It affects us physically, emotionally, and spiritually on levels that researchers are barely beginning to understand. In that case, what's the best way to minimize the bad effects sex can have, and what's the best way to have a great sex life?

Where We Get it Wrong

Believing that sex is a single act, either only physical, only emotional, or only spiritual. The truth is we leave every sexual encounter with something physical, emotional, and spiritual – good or bad.^{2,3,4}

Using sex for the wrong intentions, to feel in control or to get something in return.⁵ The truth is you are valuable simply because you are a human being and sex can't earn you love.

Casual Sex Risks

The physical consequences of having casual sex range from unplanned pregnancy to sexually transmitted infections, but can also include abuse or physical injury. Emotional risks include regret, embarrassment, and guilt. Some people become depressed and feel lonely after engaging in casual sex.³ One study showed lower levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and happiness. Finally, the spiritual consequences sound a lot like emotional risks, because depression and loneliness can be soul-deep. Sex creates a bond and even if the relationship is casual you are still bonding on a spiritual level.

What is Healthy

Sex inside a long-term, committed relationship, like marriage, is the healthiest sex possible. When we make boundaries and protect our priorities in life, we make healthier choices. Keeping your relationship in the right order is a huge step in having a happy sex life. This means being friends first (without benefits), then love, then marriage—and then sex.

Make a Plan

If you decide you are going to wait to have sex from now on until you get married, Awesome! If you live with your boyfriend, or are used to getting affection by having sex, it can be scary to make this decision to wait to have sex until you're married.

It means having a hard conversation and getting on the same page, or maybe even a breakup if he doesn't agree. This means setting ground rules together and deciding where your relationship is going. You may decide marriage is best – or your boyfriend may not *respect* or agree to your *boundaries*, in which case he does not respect or *deserve* you.

Ground Rules

- Consider having an outsider keep you *accountable*. This person can be a friend, relative, or someone you look up to and trust to help you reach your goals.
- Be proactive about spending *time* together with clothing *on*. Play video games or board games together, go on walks, interview each other about your hopes or goals. Hang out with friends and reduce time alone, which will reduce those times where things go too far.

- If things do become too *heated*, you may be the one to *stop* them from going further by *leaving* the situation. It's more important to protect yourself than his feelings.
- Decide where your relationship is going. If your relationship is not moving *ahead* to marriage, then spend some time asking *why* you are in the relationship and if it should continue.
- If you do find yourself back in bed with another partner, don't think you have failed and stop trying. Take a break from your partner and revisit why you didn't want to go down the path of casual sex.

Resources include:

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3. Krauss Whitbourne, S., Ph.D. Psychology Today. How Casual Sex Can Affect Our Mental Health. 2013. Found at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201303/how-casual-sex-can-affect-our-mental-health>, accessed 1/29/2019.
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5. Cloud, Henry. Boundaries in Dating: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Relationships. 2000. p. 73. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Press Release: New CDC Analysis Shows Steep and Sustained Increases in STDs in Recent Years. August 28, 2018. Atlanta, GA. Found at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/2018/press-release-2018-std-prevention-conference.html>, accessed 1/29/2019.
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8. Morrison-Beedy, D., Carey, M. P., Côté-Arsenault, D., Seibold-Simpson, S., & Robinson, K. A. Understanding Sexual Abstinence in Urban Adolescent Girls. 2008. Journal of obstetric, gynecologic, and neonatal nursing : JOGNN, 37(2), 185-95.
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