Dear Alice,

Although I have experimented a bit with oral sex, I still consider myself a virgin since I haven’t had intercourse. My question is, when I eventually do have sex, how important is it that I tell my partner beforehand (or, for that matter, ever) that it is my first time? I'm neither ashamed nor proud of my virginity — it's more just a matter of circumstance. Even so, I am not exactly sure how to say it and I don't want to make my partner uncomfortable. For my own sake, I don't personally feel a need to let him know, but I wonder if it is being dishonest by withholding this information?

Thanks,
Unsure

Answer

Dear Unsure,

Choosing what to tell a new potential partner can be a tough decision. While it’s not dishonest to withhold this information, it’s likely to make conversations about yours and your partner’s past trickier. Before engaging in sexual activities with a new partner, it’s helpful to talk with each other about your sexual histories and preferences to make sure you’re both on the same page. During these discussions, you may learn that you’ve each had experience with some sexual activities but not with others. It’s also worth considering that being able to talk with a potential partner about these topics may be a sign of your comfort level or readiness to have sex with that person. Read on for some tips for how to get this conversation started.

Before you decide to have sex with a new partner, you might consider the following questions:

- Do I want to have sex with this person?
- Do I feel ready to have sex?
- Am I feeling pressured to have sex? If so, what’s the source of this pressure? My partner? My friends? Myself?
- In what ways would you like to protect yourself and your partner during sex?
Pondering these questions will not only help clarify your wants and needs but will also help you plan for a safer sexual experience. If you’re looking to learn more about how to reduce risk during sex, check out the Safer Sex [2] category in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [3] archives.

You indicated that you’ve been sexually active to some degree in the past. You may want to keep in mind that activities such as oral sex, hand jobs, fingering, anal sex, and the use of toys all allow for the transmission of STIs, so you may want get tested yourself to make sure you aren’t unintentionally transmitting these diseases. Whether or not you want to delve into the specifics of the matter with a partner is your choice, but you may feel more confident discussing your sexual history if you have as much information possible, including your STI status.

If you do decide to tell a potential partner about your virginity, it may be easier to have that conversation in the context of a general discussion about both of your sexual histories and expectations for the relationship. You may find the discussion easier if you have the conversation outside the bedroom, but in a private space where you can both be comfortable enough to share your thoughts about sex and your relationship. Discussing matters such as birth control and pregnancy (if that’s a concern), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), preferred forms of protection, as well as general likes and dislikes in the bedroom may be useful. For example, you may ask your potential partner some of the following questions to start a dialogue:

- What type of protection (if any) have you used with prior sexual partners (if any)?
- If you’ve had sex, have you been tested for STIs [4]? If so, when? (HIV [5] may take up to six months to show up in a blood sample. Genital warts [6] may take up to months or years for symptoms to be visible.)
- Have you ever had an STI? If so, which one? What was the treatment?
- Are there certain sexual activities you would like to avoid? Is there one that you particularly enjoy?

The ability to have open discussions about sex with a potential partner could be an indicator that you’re willing to take that next step with this person. If you’re worried about making your partner uncomfortable, try approaching the conversation with as much confidence as you can muster. If a partner sees that you’re at ease with your virginity, they may be more likely to feel comfortable as well.

Good luck,

Alice!

Category:
Relationships [7]
Relationship Stuff [8]
Relating & Communicating [9]
Sexual & Reproductive Health [10]
Safer Sex [11]
About Virginity [12]
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) [13]
Related questions

How to ask a partner if they have any STIs [14]
History lesson: How do I ask about my partner's past? [15]
What's an STD? [16]
Why is testing of asymptomatic STIs not routine? [17]

Resources

Safer Sex Map (Morningside/ Barnard) [18]
Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [19]
Medical Services (Morningside) [20]
Center for Student Wellness (CUIMC) [21]
Medical Services (CUIMC) [22]
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Links
[1] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/should-i-tell-partner-im-virgin-0