Hi Alice,

I was wondering if there was any way that a hymen can be replaced by plastic surgery? I am not a virgin and will marry an Arab man who will expect his wife to be a virgin during the wedding. I know this must sound a little odd but I really need your help!

Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your concern about having to prove your virginity to partners, families, and communities isn’t odd; in certain communities, failure to do so may result in being shamed, rejected, ostracized, abused, or even killed. For those who are unfamiliar, the hymen is a thin membrane around the opening of the vagina. In many communities, it’s believed that the hymen will be torn or broken during sex for the first time and that a torn hymen is an indication that this person has had vaginal sex. In cases where a person may have had vaginal sex in the past but still wants to be seen as a virgin, hymenoplasty, a surgical procedure to repair or treat the hymen, may be an option. That said, there are non-surgical options to consider as well (more on those in a bit).

The reality is that in certain cultures, romantic and sexual partners, their families, and the community often expect and pressure people to prove their virginity — typically by focusing on the hymen. However, it’s critical to emphasize that there’s no clear-cut or easy way to do so. Demonstrating virginity may require formal documentation of blood on their wedding sheets or a certain level of vaginal tightness. These sources of “proof” can be unreliable, inaccurate, or misleading, largely due to pervasive myths surrounding the hymen itself. A torn or absent hymen doesn’t necessarily signal that a person has had vaginal sex. In fact, the hymen can be stretched or torn by a number of non-sexual activities (including horseback riding, dancing, tampon use [2], or a gynecological exam). Conversely, some people may not be born with a hymen at all. Roughly half of people who are assigned female at birth won’t bleed from their vaginas the first time they have vaginal sex; this may be due to the hymen being stretched beforehand, the existence of a more elastic hymen, or having no hymen at all. As such, if you feel comfortable, you could potentially share this information with your future husband with the hopes that he
doesn’t blink an eye if there aren’t tell-tale signs present on your wedding night.

When it comes to hymenoplasty, there are two main options available: temporary hymen suture and hymen reconstruction. During temporary hymen suture, remnants of the hymen are gathered and stitched together, leaving a small opening. This procedure can be performed shortly before marriage, and upon penetration, the stitches tear resulting in vaginal bleeding. Alternatively, with hymen reconstruction, the tissues are gathered by small absorbable sutures to combine them into one ‘intact’ hymen. This specific option is best done at least six weeks before the wedding to ensure the sutures have disappeared, rendering it less likely that your partner will be able to detect your surgery. If a person isn’t planning for a wedding to take place within the near future, they may prefer this option.

While both surgical options are low risk, it’s worth considering the cost, effectiveness, legality, and risks of formal documentation of the procedure. Since hymenoplasty isn’t considered to be a medical issue, it’s usually not covered by health insurance. Additionally, neither surgery guarantees that a person will bleed from their vagina during sex; if doing so is the way you hope to signal to your future husband that you’re a virgin, these surgeries may not be the best options. Furthermore, depending on where you live, hymenoplasty surgeries may be illegal; therefore it may be difficult to find a medical provider to perform the surgery. And even if these procedures are legal, many medical providers may be opposed to performing the surgery. Given these factors, you may wish to explore non-surgical options that bare low medical risk, are legal, less costly, and can possibly work better for “proving” your virginity.

When it comes to non-surgical or alternate options, it’s good to first think about what you might need to demonstrate your virginity. Researchers have looked into alternatives for those who need to do this. Depending on your situation, here are some of the options they have considered:

- **Getting a virginity certificate.** There are health care providers who issue formal certificates to confirm that a person is a virgin, regardless of their previous sexual experiences.
- **Inserting a capsule of food coloring into the vagina.** This can be done 30 minutes before sex and will produce a red blood-like stain on the sheets (though this won't change or deepen color over time as real blood would).
- **Using an artificial hymen kit.** This kit contains a small package made of folded gelatin containing blood-like paste, which will also stain the sheets. Similar to the food capsule, this paste also stays the same color over time. Furthermore, since this kit is only available online, there may be an online paper trail that your future husband or relatives can find.
- **Pricking your finger and smearing the blood on the sheets.** However, since pricks are typically shallow, this may result in an insufficient amount of blood on the sheets.
- **Doing pelvic floor exercises**. Vaginal tightness is based on vaginal or pelvic muscles (and not virginity), so you might try to increase your vaginal tightness by doing exercises leading up to, and during your first time having sex with your partner.

At the end of the day, you have the power to decide if and how you wish move forward with “proving” your virginity. During this decision-making process, it may be helpful to reflect upon how you feel about the expectation that you be a virgin before marriage — are you okay with it? How do you feel about potentially having to use surgical or non-surgical options to “prove” this status?
Do you expect him to be a virgin? Do you know if he’s had any previous sexual experiences? It would also be good to determine the pros and cons of making these preparations, as any of these options will require some advanced planning. Gauging how you feel may help you determine how best to proceed, while considering your safety and happiness in this situation.

Take care,

Alice!

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Published date:
Nov 01, 2002

Last reviewed on:
May 18, 2018

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