Can you get pregnant the first time? [1]

Dear Alice,

Can you get pregnant the first time?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The short answer is yes; someone can absolutely get pregnant the first time they have vaginal sex. And many people have. When one partner’s semen (cum) comes into contact with another partner’s vagina, pregnancy is theoretically possible — regardless of whether it’s anyone’s first time or their thousandth. Fertility, however, can be fickle. Some people who desperately wish to conceive have to try for months or years before success. Other people unexpectedly conceive the first time they have sex. Ready for some more baby-making biology? Read on!

In a typical menstrual cycle, hormones stimulate the ovaries to release an egg, a process known as ovulation. Ovulation most often happens around day 14 of the typical 28-day cycle. It’s good to note that many people’s cycles fall between 26 to 32 days but the exact timing of ovulation can vary from person to person. After ovulation, the egg journeys down the fallopian tube where it has about 24 hours to meet up with a sperm cell. If fertilized by sperm, the egg moves to the uterus, where it attaches to the uterine lining. At that point, early pregnancy symptoms begin and periods generally stop.

Fertility basically comes down to this: pregnancy is most likely to occur any time someone has unprotected sex during ovulation (or on the days just before ovulation, since sperm can live in the reproductive tract for up to six days). That said, determining when someone is ovulating isn’t an exacting process. Since many people don’t have perfectly regular cycles, physical signs of ovulation are often more reliable than an expected calendar date. If you’re interested in becoming pregnant, you may find it useful to learn to recognize the times when you’re most fertile. You can learn more about the menstrual cycle[2] and fertility awareness[3] in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health[4] archives. A health care provider can also be a useful resource about menstrual history and cycle.

What’s the take home message? When sperm and egg cells get to minglin’, pregnancy is a
possibility regardless of anyone's previous sexual activity. If pregnancy isn't in your plans, have no fear! Condoms, when used consistently and correctly [5], can offer reliable protection against pregnancy and many STIs. Lots of other forms of birth control, both hormonal and non-hormonal, are available as well. You can check out the Contraception [6] category for more information about different options. Using this information can help to help plan ahead, whether the goal is to increase or decrease the risk of pregnancy. Having an open conversation with sexual partners can help to ensure that they're on the same page and that they're maximizing pleasure between the sheets.

Alice!
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