Deciding when to have sex for the first time

Hi Alice,

I have recently started university and moved away from home, and also I have met a guy who is now my boyfriend; it is going to be three weeks since we started dating and it has all been really good. We also have already started talking about making love and my boyfriend isn't forcing me into anything, and when I'm with him, it feels right, but the only thing that is bothering me is the fact it will only be three weeks. Both of us are virgins and I know he is sure he wants to lose his virginity to me and I feel the same way, but the time factor really bothers me. I really want to make this relationship work, and I think I'm going to be in love with him very soon...

My question is that are we rushing into things? Considering I have never been touched the way he has touched me, and if I am ready in such a short time period, should we go for it? Also what is the most reliable source of protection and where can I get it from? I want to take every precaution to make this one moment in my life the most amazing moment. Thank you very much.

Love, A.J.

Answer

Dear A.J.,

Choosing to have sex for the first time can be a major decision for you and your partner. You're taking a great first step in the decision-making process by spending time thinking about your choices and what implications there might be for you, your partner, and your relationship. While this may not be the answer you're looking for, there are no right or wrong answers to your questions. There's no exact time period a couple needs to wait to have sex. But there are questions you and your partner can work through together to help you think through the pros, cons, and ways to reduce risk as you both determine if this is a good next step to take in your relationship. To your question about protection (a key consideration when deciding whether or not to have sex), there are a number of options to choose from, so doing a little homework and seeking out some professional assistance can help you figure out the most reliable method and where you can access it.

You mention that the length of your relationship is one factor that's been bothering you. It might help to reflect on it further to see why you're feeling this way and to decide if it's a meaningful factor when making this decision. You might also consider the following questions...
to help you figure out whether you and your partner are ready to take the plunge:

- How's your communication? Are you able to share your thoughts and feelings openly with each other?
- What does having sex mean to you? How about to your partner? Are you on the same page when it comes to what sex might mean for your relationship?
- What would happen if you waited a little longer? What might you lose? What might you gain?
- Are there other options besides sex that you can explore to enhance your relationship?
- Are you and your partner talking about having safer sex?
- When you picture yourselves having sex together, what parts of the imagined experience seem great? What parts make you feel somewhat nervous? What about your partner?

It may help to make an old fashioned "pros" and "cons" list or write down some of your feelings and concerns about having sex; sometimes seeing the words on paper can help you reflect on your thoughts. If something stands out to you as a reoccurring theme or a nagging concern, you might decide to just hold off on making the decision. Now may not be the time for you to have sex, but you can always change your mind! In the meantime, you can enjoy getting to know your partner more intimately, discovering your common ground, and learning more about each other, past, present, and future.

If or when you choose to have sex, there are myriad options for safer sex that can help protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy including barrier methods (such as condoms) and birth control. For more extensive information about safer sex and different types of contraception, take a look at the Go Ask Alice!'s Sexual & Reproductive Health archives. You and your partner can also talk with a health care provider or health promotion professional for more information.

Lastly, it's also worth mentioning that the "first time" experience can range from "earth-shatteringly amazing" to "no big deal" to "painful, messy, and awkward." The idea of having sex is often thrilling, but it's also helpful to keep in mind that things may not always go as planned. Communication with your partner is vital, so that you can adjust, laugh, and create "the moment" as the experience unfolds. Being sexual with someone doesn't always come naturally; it's typically something that improves with time, trust, communication, and practice.

Best of luck determining the decision that works for you both.

Alice!

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