Abstinent and horny [1]

(1) Dear Alice,

Can you still have sexual urges if you are abstinent?

(2)
Alice,

I have a question from my college sexuality class: "In what behaviors can one participate and still be sexually abstinent?" What would be your response?

Answer

Dear Readers,

Having a conversation about abstinence among a group of diverse individuals is a great way to learn about and understand differing points of view. It's also a great opportunity to learn other ways that people express intimacy while still being abstinent.

Anyone can have sexual urges, desires, and feelings and still be abstinent. People make choices about their behaviors to be abstinent or sexually active. Regardless of their choices, they can still acknowledge, experience, and enjoy their sexuality: sexual thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires that are a natural and healthy part of sexual development. Through this process, we recognize and learn more about what either appeals to us or turns us off. Some people ignore these sexual feelings. Others acknowledge and express their sexual feelings, their desire to touch and be touched or held, while still maintaining boundaries. Before figuring out the range of caring, tender, or sexual behaviors one can participate in and still be abstinent, one must define abstinence for her- or himself. "Sex," as well as "abstinence," can mean different things to different people.

To some, abstinence is not having any type of sexual experience. To others, it means not having oral, anal, or vaginal sex. Some define abstinence specifically as not allowing penetration or not having vaginal or anal intercourse, but believe that oral sex is acceptable for them to give or get. Sometimes people decide to be abstinent until marriage, whereas others may be abstinent for a certain period of time (e.g., between partners, when they first go to college).

Those who acknowledge their feelings but choose not to have any kind of sexual contact can
redirect this sexual energy into other activities with or without a partner:

- Dancing or exercising
- Shopping or even window shopping
- Reading a book or watching a movie
- Meditating
- Taking a shower
- Being with friends
- Picnicking in the park or strolling on the beach
- Playing video games
- Giving or receiving a hug(s)
- Holding hands with someone you care about
- Cooking dinner and dining by candlelight

In addition to the above ideas, those who decide to be physically intimate with a partner without having oral, anal, or vaginal sex can do the following and other things we may not have listed or thought of:

- Give or receive soft sensuous or deep passionate kisses
- Enjoy a back rub or full body massage
- Cuddle, caress, or stroke each other with fingers, lips, and tongues, with or without clothes on
- Slowly, sensuously undress one another
- Touch one’s self in front of a partner, with or without touching her or him, with or without orgasm
- Skinny dip in a pool or pond
- Shower or bathe together

People are abstinent for many reasons, including religious or cultural views, personal or family values, or simply not being ready to have sex. To know for yourself, consider taking time to think about what abstinence means to you. This may help you to make choices that are harmonious with your beliefs (until you choose to change your mind, rather than changing it in the heat of the moment).

Alice!

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