

So you want to have sex?

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Getting pregnant is a choice and the ability to prevent a conception paramount to women's ongoing struggle for equality. When an unwed young woman becomes pregnant, many options are eliminated and society frowns on her for making "bad choices", leaving her to sort out all the details of life with a child as a single parent. Even with a supportive partner and a loving family unit (a rarity for most), this young girl will bear the burden of carrying, delivering, nursing and, most likely, providing primary parenting for a child for at least 18 years. As a mother of any age will attest, once her child is born, all personal aspirations take a back seat. If this young parent has not yet completed school, gained employment skills or even had opportunity to experience life, she is destined for tremendous challenges. Even if abstinence is the program of choice, we are obliged to protect the younger generation by equipping them with information and education about their sexual health. Given that about half of teens with unintended pregnancies were not using contraception when they became pregnant, it follows that pro-active sexual health education will serve to reduce this burden. Teens less than 15 years of age accounted for 4500 births in 2010, lending strength to the evidence that promotion of delayed sexual debut and increased use of highly effective contraception should prove effective at reducing teen pregnancy. Along with information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the availability of contraceptive options is an excellent way to open that dialogue with those we most wish to protect. As many contraceptive options are only available through a healthcare provider, annual health visits for teens need to be encouraged, even in the most protective homes or maybe moreso for those girls who cannot talk openly with their parents. As a parent, assurance that you have an advocate that your daughter can relate to and will heed advice from, is reassuring.

For those interested in the public health aspects of reducing teen pregnancy, consider involvement in schools and community-based programs for sexual health education for greatest impact on the next generation. Imagine the ripple effect of saving even one child from premature motherhood. Opening dialogue and quelling the stigma associated with these issues will go a long way to educating our sons and daughters and, ultimately, will help these boys and girls grow into happy, healthy partners for their spouses someday. Many mature women grace our ob/gyn offices visibly terrified of open discussion about sexual health issues, yet craving the physical intimacy that glues their marriage over decades. To us, it seems a heartfelt and wonderful gift to give our children; the ability to manage their reproductive lives and learn, in an unthreatening environment, the joy and love associated with true "love-making".

In 2010 approximately 368 000 births occurred in U.S. teenagers 15-19 years of age and only 60% of sexually experienced teens reported using a highly effective birth

control like an IUCD or hormonal method. The ability to avoid unplanned pregnancy becomes essential as we place more emphasis on education and career development for young girls. We are slowly making headway toward gender and ethnic equality; we have not yet arrived. The definition of equality is somewhat controversial but includes equal opportunities for all people and an ability to fulfill one's dreams, whatever they may be. This is, without doubt, something we should be trying to achieve for our children and we will not get there without conscious effort. We will have arrived when couples have the option of reliable and reversible birth control options specifically for use by men, yet to be invented. For now, we progress slowly toward a truly equal world in which women have complete control over their bodies, their lives and their futures.

#### References:

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