

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure

Sexual History Should Not Be a Mystery

When Ben Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” he wasn’t talking about sex, but the aphorism is worth keeping in mind before you enter into a sexual relationship. Knowing a potential partner’s sexual history may help you stop and think before putting your health at risk.

Q. My lifelong partner died last year, and I’m ready to find a companion/lover. Should I hide the fact that I’ve only had one partner my whole life, so I don’t look like a prude?

Anyone who thinks badly of you because you were in a monogamous relationship is misguided. Your choice to remain faithful says a lot about your character and commitment. If your partner was also monogamous throughout your relationship, you have much less chance of having ever been exposed to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which makes you a low-risk partner. Protect your healthy status by using condoms if you engage in partnered sex.

Q. Asking about a potential partner’s sexual history seems so rude. How can I do it politely?

You needn’t ask for names, dates, and details. You do need enough information to assess any health risk you might expose yourself to. Be willing to share your own story. Start by giving your own answers to these questions, and then ask your potential new partner:

- Have you ever participated in intercourse (oral sex, vaginal sex, or anal sex) without a condom?
- Have you ever had unprotected sex with someone with HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, or herpes?
- What were the results of tests for sexually transmitted infection (STIs) conducted after the last sexual encounter (request the paperwork; people may lie about test results)?
- Have you or your partner(s) ever had sex with an injection drug user or have used recreational injection drugs?

Q. The woman I’m dating was in an abusive marriage. Is that why she’s holding back sexually?

Abuse can leave both physical and emotional scars, but don’t jump to conclusions. She may want to build a relationship prior to engaging in lovemaking; indeed, she may be just as eager as you are to have sex. Past relationships, healthy and not-so-healthy, are part of each person’s sexual history. Offer your story and invite her to share hers.

Q. When is the right time to ask about someone’s sexual history?

Some people ask before they kiss or get emotionally involved. Others wait until the topic of sexual activity comes up. Share histories before you engage in any type of genital contact with someone. Pick a private place when you won’t be interrupted or overheard and when you are both relaxed. Assure your potential partner that you will keep the conversation confidential and that you expect the same in return.

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<http://www.njsexualwellness.com> Through Honest Exchange LLC, <http://www.honestexchange.com> she helps doctors and educators learn about and talk about sexuality; she also presents on self esteem, body image, and on the sexual impact of cancer, menopause and aging. She is an AASECT-Certified Sexuality Educator. Copyright 2012©by Honest Exchange LLC