

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safe 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 can 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 barrier protection 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) had sex with a recreational injection drug user

Q. The person I’m dating was in an abusive marriage. Is that why they are holding back sexually?

Abuse can leave both physical and emotional scars, but don’t jump to conclusions. They may want to build a relationship prior to engaging in lovemaking; indeed, they 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 them to share theirs.

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

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

About the Author: Melanie Davis, PhD, www.melaniemelanie.com consults with individuals and couples to help them build sexual knowledge, comfort, and pleasure through the New Jersey Center for Sexual Wellness. <http://www.njsexualwellness.com> She trains medical and other human services professionals and also offers consumer programs on self-esteem, body image, and on the sexual impact of cancer, menopause and aging. She is an AASECT-Certified Sexuality Counselor, Educator, and Educator-Supervisor and author of Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education for Older Adults, available at www.uuabookstore.org © 2012, 2022 Melanie Davis, All Rights Reserved.