Q. I am a virgin and I get angry and sad when sex is talked about as if it does not come with a price. I have countless friends who are having sex, but are not really happy about it nor want to have it. I also know many who regret sexual intimacy they had with partners who ended up caring very little about them. I want others to know that it’s possible to be a virgin and feel completely satisfied and happy; and that it’s possible to be deeply loved by a partner who respects you enough not to have sex with you. Thanks!

A. Thank you for your letter. It gives us an opportunity to address an equally important issue in sexual health and fulfillment – abstinence.

While popular media continues to glamorize sex making it seem like everyone is hooking up, abstinence is actually on the rise. A national study conducted in 2001 revealed that 54.4% of American teens are choosing to remain abstinent, up from 45.9% in 1991 (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, CDC). Perhaps even more significant, a recent survey revealed that 63% of teens that have been sexually active said they wish they had waited longer to have sex (With One Voice 2002, n=1001).

Choosing abstinence does not mean an individual is nonsexual or a “prude”. It simply means the person is choosing not to have a sexual partner at this time in life. And, there are a lot of good reasons for making this choice:

- **Unwilling to risk an unplanned pregnancy or contract an STD** – Anytime you have sex, no matter how protected it is, there’s a chance of disease and pregnancy.
- **Not ready for the level of intimacy and responsibility that a sexual relationship entails** – Broken hearts can occur in any relationship, but when sex is involved the emotional wounds are almost always deeper and harder to heal.
- **Sex just doesn’t feel like the “right” decision right now** – Whether this is based on religious reasons, family reasons, or just a gut instinct, it’s a feeling that deserves to be honored.

People who end up regretting sex, usually had sex for the wrong reasons – someone else wanted them to, they thought it would cement or forge a relationship, they wanted to “fit in”, or they just wanted to “get it over with”. The bottom line is – sex that makes you feel bad about yourself is just not worth having.