

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

51% of UA students are single or casually dating. 38% are exclusively dating one person. 7% are engaged or married.

(2008 Health & Wellness Survey, n=1,250)

Q. Is it common for a woman to break her hymen before losing her virginity?

A. The short answer to your question is “yes”. A thin membrane that partially covers the opening of the vagina, the hymen – sometimes referred to as the “cherry” – has long been viewed as proof of female virginity. In reality, whether the hymen is intact can depend on a range of factors unrelated to sexual intercourse. Females may tear or stretch their hymen through activities as diverse as riding a bike or horse, having a gynecological exam, doing gymnastics or using a tampon – all prior to having sex for the first time.

Further complicating things is the fact that hymens vary in size and the area of the vagina they cover, and some females may have hymens so small they are difficult to detect. For others who have hymens that are thicker than average, first intercourse is often accompanied by a significant amount of blood and discomfort. More typical for that first time, however, is a small amount of blood similar to a finger cut, or no blood at all.

Even today, there is more emphasis on the hymen as an indicator for sexual experience than it probably deserves. For some, the force of societal pressure leads to hymenorrhaphy – the surgical repair of the hymen – which continues to divide people and medical providers as to its value. And believe it or not, surgery has even given us a procedure by which a gelatin capsule filled with fake blood is inserted in the vagina, which bursts during intercourse.

Whatever your beliefs on virginity, the hymen and its role in selecting a potential partner may be, successful relationships tend to be built on things that are less ephemeral: communication, shared values and trust.

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