



Teen Pregnancy: The Realities

Question: How does someone become pregnant?

No “birds and bees” talk here—just the basics. Pregnancy occurs when the male sperm and female egg unite, and the fertilized egg (or “zygote”) develops into a fetus. Typically, fertilization occurs in the girl’s fallopian tubes, and the zygote travels down the tube into the uterus, where it makes clever use of about nine months to grow into a full-term baby. Answered another way, a person naturally becomes pregnant through sexual intercourse. However, full sexual intercourse is not required—if the couple engages in other activities during which semen approaches the vaginal opening, there is potential for a pregnancy. Sperm from the semen may find their way inside the girl’s body, and then proceed to seek out and fertilize the egg^[1].

Question: How many teenage girls get pregnant every year?

In the United States, the estimated number of teenage girls getting pregnant each year ranges from about 800,000 to almost 1,000,000^[2]!



Question: Isn't it true that a girl can only get pregnant for a few days each month? So aren't we safe to have sex when she's having her period?

While it’s true that there is a small window of time in which a woman may become pregnant (this can only happen during ovulation), the problem is that she doesn’t know when that may happen. It may occur soon enough after her previous month’s bleeding, that having sexual intercourse could still bring about a pregnancy. Add to this the fact that male sperm may reside in a woman’s body for several days and still fertilize the egg, and the whole situation becomes even more complicated^[3]! Bottom line: you can get pregnant if you have sex during your period.

Question: If we use condoms every time we have sex, are we safe and protected from a pregnancy?

Unfortunately, research has shown us that the condom is not 100% effective against pregnancy, even when used perfectly in the best possible conditions! In terms of how condoms are typically used nationwide, 14-15% of couples using condoms still become pregnant^[4].

Question: If I get pregnant, won't it make my relationship with my boyfriend stronger?

First of all, you need to decide if those are really the terms upon which you want to build a relationship. Are relationships healthiest when someone feels forced into it? Usually, the opposite will happen—the person who is forced into a relationship starts to resent it and may become angry. Think instead about what it means to start your relationship on a healthy path!

You might also want to consider everyone that is going to be impacted by this pregnancy—including the baby itself, your parents, siblings, other relatives, and friends. Our choices affect a lot more than ourselves, tough as that may be. That's why it's important for us to make wise choices.



Question: So what are the consequences of pregnancy for a teenager?

Teenage pregnancy has some very large consequences. For example, the fact is that a teenage girl's body is not as ready to carry a baby as it will be when she's older—most teenage girls do not gain adequate weight during the pregnancy, and tend to have poor dietary habits. This can actually lead to low birth-weight for the baby, and even infant and childhood disorders!

Pregnancy can affect your goals for education, athletics, or careers. It brings a huge financial cost as well. And before you assume it only affects young women, you should know: teenage pregnancies have been associated to an increased rate of delinquent behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse, lower education levels, and decreased ability to make money among the fathers of the children^[5]. Pregnancy affects the mother and the father!

Question: What's the best way to avoid a pregnancy, then?

The best way to avoid a teenage pregnancy is through abstinence. By choosing to postpone sexual activity until you are in a faithful, committed marriage relationship, you are doing everything you can to provide your children with the emotional, spiritual, and financial stability they will need to grow healthy and happy. It's kind of simple, but that doesn't make it stupid. Abstinence is a smart choice—for you, your loved ones, and your future children.

[1] For more information on this, check out www.babycenter.com/0_getting-pregnant-how-babies-are-made_7056.bc.

[2] The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy estimates about 820,000 teen pregnancies per year (www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/fact_sheets/complcmt.asp), while Rutgers' National Marriage Project figures about one million (<http://marriage.rutgers.edu/publications/pubteenp.htm>).

[3] A helpful site to more fully explain this possibility is available at http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/sex_during_period.html.

[4] The February 2005 edition of *Consumer Reports* magazine gives a terrific chart demonstrating the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of various contraceptives, including the male latex condom.

[5] This from www.womenshealthchannel.com/teenpregnancy/index.shtml#baby.
