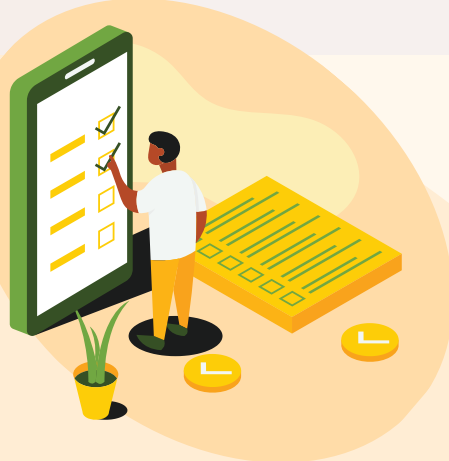


The Risks and Benefits of Being "Early to Bed": Toward a Broader Understanding of Age at Sexual Debut and Sexual Health in Adulthood

Peragine et al. (2022).

Though earlier sexual initiation has been tied to numerous sexual health risks, we asked if it might also have benefits when sexual debuts beyond intercourse are considered.



Method

3,139 Canadian adults were surveyed on their age at various sexual firsts, as well as on markers of sexual health risk and healthy sexual function

A sexual health risk?

Like other studies, we found **earlier sexual intercourse** was linked to greater risk of:

- Nonconsensual sex
- Abortion or miscarriage
- Reproductive illness, infection, or injury impairing sexual activity (e.g., STIs)

Likewise, **earlier sexual contact** with a partner was associated with greater risk of nonconsensual sex.



Or a precursor to healthy sex?

In addition to risk, **earlier sexual intercourse** had ties to healthier sexual function, including:

- Lower sexual inhibition
- Fewer issues with orgasm and sexual pain

While **earlier sexual stimulation** and **orgasm** were unrelated to sexual health risk, they had ties to several benefits, including fewer sexual desire difficulties and greater sexual excitement.

In conclusion...

Findings raise the possibility that earlier sexual intercourse is both a predisposing and protective factor for sexual health.

They also raise the possibility that an earlier sexual debut confers more benefits than risks to sexual health when it is not partnered.

Collectively, results suggest early life is not just a vulnerable period for sexual problems, but a window of opportunity for learning to have healthy sex — and that efforts to delay sexual debut may need refining.

