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Aged 33 and 27, sisters Miriam and Samantha are successful, attractive, popular – and have NEVER had sex. Just two of a new breed of women in their prime who are ...

# Happy to be



**THEY'RE** stylish, eligible women who you'd assume would have their pick of lovers. But the women you're about to meet share a surprising secret: they are all virgins. They are among a growing number of women who have decided that sex, for all the emphasis placed on it in today's society, holds no place in their lives. Here they tell ANTONIA HOYLE why they are celibate ...

**SISTERS** Miriam and Samantha Babooram grew up in Darlington, County Durham, with parents Harry, a psychiatric nurse, and Sally, a nursery manager, and brother Davey, 30. Miriam, 33, an actress, and Samantha, 27, a cosmetics sales assistant, both live in London. Miriam says:

MY FATHER taught me I should put my energies into making a success of myself rather than thinking about boys. He moved from his native Mauritius to Britain in 1969 and married my mother, Sally, nine years later.

An ambitious man, he wanted to build a better life for his family. As a result, he instilled a staunch work ethic in his children, and I was determined to make him proud.

I was the 'nerd' at school. I got

crushes, but I was shy. I was besotted with a boy when I was 16, but every time I saw him I became a nervous wreck. I was 17 before I kissed anyone.

I was the first in our family to go to university. I went to Swansea to study English and Drama, and didn't want to squander the opportunity.

My female flatmates all lost their virginity around that time. I was curious, but too focused on my studies to experiment. I went to parties and flirted, but boys were never my priority.

After I graduated, I went to drama school. Actresses have a reputation for being flirty, but for me it was all about attending endless castings to get work. Securing theatrical roles left me with little time to date. In any case, the longer I went without sex, the more

Pictures:  
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Samantha Babooram

Miriam Babooram

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determined I became to hold out for someone special. Why would you want to throw away your virginity on someone you barely know?

I wear short skirts and low-cut tops, and I like to look attractive. My ideal man is dark and brooding, like Johnny Depp, with a great sense of humour.

The reaction I get when I tell men I'm a virgin – which I tend to do if we get past the first or second date – ranges from fascination to confusion.

I won't go further than kissing. A couple of times I've had a bit too much to drink and ended up naked in bed with a date. It's not that I'm immune to physical pleasure, but intercourse is a line I won't cross until I meet the man I want to commit to for life.

Now I'm in my 30s, I worry I'll never find the right man. Most are married with children by now, and dates find my virginity more off-putting than alluring.

Some of my friends say I should just have sex – even my mum thinks I should. She doesn't think there's any harm in sex as long as I'm loved and respected by a man.

My father died five years ago. He'd probably wish I was married, but I think he'd be proud I'm still waiting.

When I find the right man, we'll have the rest of our lives to enjoy each other's bodies. I've seen the hurt casual sex can cause.

**MIRIAM'S** sister Samantha says: I'VE never been on a date, let alone kissed a man. As a teenager, I felt fat and geeky. I wasn't huge – I was a size 12 at the age of 14 – but boys weren't interested in me.

The closest I have ever got to romantic involvement was when I was 18, and an attractive boy chatted me up in my local nightclub. I kissed him on the cheek. He muttered something like: 'Is that all?' and I ran off, embarrassed.

In my 20s I lost my puppy fat and developed more confidence, but my parents' belief that sex shouldn't simply be a trivial pastime lingered, and it has undoubtedly shaped my attitude.

So, too, has my sister's celibacy. I looked at her life and saw it was perfectly possible to be happy and fulfilled without having a sexual relationship.

Since I left college, where I studied music, and moved to London seven years ago, I've barely been chatted up, even though I think I have gone full-circle from geeky to good-looking.

I don't want to sound conceited, but friends – both male and female – tell me men don't approach me because I'm too pretty.

I probably seem unattainable, and in a way I am because I'm not prepared to lower my standards. I wouldn't sleep with a man unless we were in a serious relationship.

Most of my friends think sex is overrated anyway. When I make my toffee orange pudding, they say it's better than sex, which makes me wonder what all the fuss is about.

**S**OME people have sex to get attention from a man. They think they can have one-night stands without emotion getting in the way, but actually they're just ruining their self-esteem. I've lost count of the number of evenings I've spent consoling friends who've had sex on a first date and never heard from the man again.

A lot of people I know have caught sexually transmitted infections, or had abortions, and I've seen the heartache that can cause. Sex seems to have become more of a recreational sport than an act of love, and I think that's a shame because it should be something intimate and special.

People ask if I feel under any pressure to find a man, like Miriam does. But the truth is, I don't. I volunteer or a homeless charity, which gives me a greater sense of satisfaction than my half-baked sexual encounter.

I'm in no hurry to commit. I want to enjoy my freedom for as long as I can.

**TONIA EVES**, 27, is an office administrator from Wimbledon in South-West London. She says:

WENT to an all-girls private school which was described by the local boys



**Still waiting: Left to right, Miriam Potter, Lucy Richardson and Victoria Eves**

Sundays. I was never curious about sex, so abstaining wasn't a struggle, and as each year passed I became less bothered about having a physical relationship.

Once a month or so I might feel a flicker of desire, but nothing I need to act on. I enjoy myself in other ways. I watch medical dramas and wildlife documentaries, and I do craft work.

I'm no longer interested in parenthood. Friends who've become mothers have completely lost their freedom. I don't want to run around after a husband either.

My friends know I'm a virgin but don't judge. They know how impossible it would be for me to have sex. I have accepted I will remain a virgin for ever and I'm perfectly happy with that.

**LUCY RICHARDSON, 40, is an office assistant from Eastbourne, East Sussex. She says:**

I'VE always known I couldn't cope with the consequences of a sexual relationship if it wasn't accompanied by serious commitment.

If I lost my virginity to a man who then left me, I would feel exploited and fall to pieces. So I only want to have sex with someone I'm married to, and know I will spend the rest of my life with.

My parents were in a loving marriage and my older brother and I had a stable, happy upbringing.

My parents were farmers, and I was relaxed around the male workers they employed. But when I was 11, I was sent to an all-girls private school and started being bullied.

The cool girls jeered at my jeans and sweatshirts, made jibes about my weight, and laughed at my dancing at the school discos.

I started to feel insecure about the way I looked, and hid myself in baggy jumpers. I couldn't stand the thought of anyone seeing me naked.

**T**HIS was all in the late Eighties, when the Aids epidemic was prevalent, and I learned to associate casual sex with disease. Remaining a virgin seemed the only way to remain happy and healthy, and from my early teens I vowed to abstain from sex. The feelings of being different never really left me, and my shyness made me seem stand-offish.

I became a nursery nurse when I was 19, but I was 23 before I got my first boyfriend and experienced my first kiss. We met in the local pub and were together for three months before he found someone else.

The fact that we hadn't embarked on a physical relationship made it easier to deal with the break-up, but I was terribly upset. I didn't have another relationship for four years.

I've had five relationships in total, lasting from three weeks to 15 months. But I've never felt comfortable doing anything more than kissing and holding hands.

I'm attracted to men, but being celibate is so ingrained in my consciousness now that I'll always say no to sex. I tell them I'm a virgin as soon as they make a physical move.

Six months into my last relationship, my boyfriend admitted he'd only pretended he was happy not to have sex because he thought he could change my mind. I couldn't trust him after that, and we broke up last year.

I've been single ever since.

For years all I could think about was getting married, but I'm more confident and happy on my own now. It would be brilliant if I met the right man, especially if it wasn't too late to have children with him, but it's not a disaster if I don't.

I love the sense of freedom and independence being single affords me, and there's certainly no danger of me ending up bitter and twisted.

# My friends tell me making love is over-rated. They say my toffee brioche pudding is better than sex

as 'Whores on the Hill' because the girls there were so slutty. I was a tomboy and always felt different to the others. I wore jeans and sweatshirts and had no desire to dress provocatively to get attention. In fact I felt sorry for those who did.

There was one boy I liked when I was 14, but he asked my best friend out the week after I declared my feelings for him and I was heartbroken.

I went on a string of dates after I left school, but didn't meet anyone I was seriously interested in. I remember taking one boy to a birthday party, only for him to spend the entire time ogling someone else, which certainly didn't do anything for my self-confidence.

I wasn't brought up a Christian, but I read Dan Brown's novel Angels And Demons when I was 21, and its theories on Christianity made me question my beliefs.

So I went on a course to learn about the faith, and within months I was baptised.

Christianity gave me a sense of belonging, and my attitude towards men changed. Whereas before I'd been desperate for a boyfriend, suddenly I was determined to wait until I was married before I had sex. I don't think having sex out of wedlock is something a Christian should do. I'm single

at the moment, but I've joined a Christian dating agency, christianconnection.co.uk, and now the men I meet understand why I want to wait before I have sex.

I'm not going to lie — I look at David Beckham in his underpants and think he's attractive — but I've always managed to quash any impulse to act on my desire.

My colleagues have been supportive and they respect the fact that I know my own mind, but there's still a stigma attached to being celibate at 27.

Films like The 40-Year-Old Virgin don't help. They instil the idea that anyone who is a virgin, when I am absolutely certain it's a positive thing. Several of my friends have met men who have subsequently lost interest after they've slept together.

My father died from a brain tumour three years ago. My mother is supportive of my choices, but she's also desperate for grandchildren.

I've had to tell her to stop nagging me, and remind her that anyone can get pregnant, but I'm choosing to wait until I can bring my children up in a stable and loving environment.

I don't feel I'm missing out, because it's hard to miss something you haven't had. If anything, remaining a

virgin has enriched my life because it's freed me from the burden of relationships, and allowed me to concentrate on what's important in life.

**MIRIAM POTTER, 45, lives alone in Reading, Berkshire. She is unable to work and says:**

FOR 13 years I've had chronic health problems which have made it virtually impossible for me to meet men, let alone consider embarking on a physical relationship.

I developed ME — chronic fatigue syndrome — after a bout of flu 13 years ago. It was so severe I had to give up my job as a secretary, and I haven't worked since.

My illness left me too tired to get off the sofa, let alone go on a date or have the energy for love-making.

Sadly, the condition has never really improved, and it also triggered the peri-menopause — the onset of the menopause.

As a result I had terrible period pains and hot flushes, and became very snappy and bad-tempered.

Even my friends stayed away from me. The idea of finding a boyfriend who would tolerate my aggressive mood swings was inconceivable.

I had one two-year relationship when I was 26, but it ended because I wanted to settle down and have children and he didn't. To this day, he's the only man I've ever kissed.

I come from a strict family background. My older sister and I were very loved, but we were disciplined and got the slipper if we stayed out too late or didn't finish our homework. New clothes and toys were kept for

## Who knew?

More than 60 per cent of sexually active teenagers said they wished they had waited longer before losing their virginity, according to a new survey