

What to do with your condoms?

- So that you're always prepared, carry lubricant and condoms (not just one) when going out – in jacket pockets, wallet, hand bag, etc.
- Keep condoms from getting crushed and away from strong sunlight and heat (bed side lamps, radiators, window ledges, trouser pockets, etc) – this weakens the rubber.
- Take care opening the wrapper – teeth, nails and jewellery can puncture condoms.
- If you're a man practise using condoms on your own, so you're ready to use them for real.
- Don't put a condom on too late. Foreplay that lets an uncovered penis in or near the vagina can cause pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. The man's 'pre-cum' can carry sperm or infections, or he might ejaculate sooner than expected.
- Sex toys used on several people need covering with a fresh condom for each person to prevent infections spreading.

Condom solutions

Am I holding the condom the right way round?

Put it on your finger – if it starts to roll down easily, it's on correctly. If not, take off and put on the other way round.

Condoms make a man lose his erection

These help men stay hard:

- holding the base of the penis to stop blood leaving it;
- him wearing a 'cock ring';
- the other person putting the condom on for him.

Putting a condom on hurts

Try a larger condom (Avanti Ultima condoms are the biggest and least tight). Or unroll the condom first, then with thumbs inside the condom, stretch it open and put it over the head of the penis like a sock over a foot. Then roll down as normal. Some find this helpful but beware: stretching condoms and air trapped inside them makes them more likely to come off or break.

The condom gets stuck as it's rolled down the penis

Roll it back up the penis, then roll down again.

The condom came off

Friction can pull a condom off if not enough lubricant is used.

Getting lube *underneath* the condom can make it slip off.

Maybe a tighter fit condom is needed.

A condom only rolled half way down the penis is more likely to be pulled off.

Straight after the man has ejaculated, hold the condom at its base as the penis is pulled out – this stops the condom coming off inside the other person.

Should one condom be worn on top of another?

No. Friction from two condoms rubbing against each other makes them more likely to break.

Should a condom be worn for oral sex?

Sexually transmitted infections can be passed on during oral sex, and some people have got HIV from performing oral sex on someone with HIV. So a person wanting to reduce risk as much as possible might decide to use condoms for oral sex. Flavoured ones taste better for this. Call THT Direct on 0845 12 21 200 for more information on the risks from oral sex.

What if there's an accident with the condom?

Call THT Direct on 0845 12 21 200 as soon as possible for details of emergency contraception (such as the 'morning after pill') or PEP (a treatment to stop HIV infection).

Or visit:

www.tht.org.uk/pep (information on PEP)

www.fpa.org.uk (search for emergency contraception)

For details of Terrence Higgins Trust centres, information and advice, condoms and lubricant visit www.tht.org.uk or call

THT DIRECT > 0845 12 21 200

Low cost condoms can be purchased online at: www.freedoms-shop.com

The HIV and sexual health charity for life

Website: www.tht.org.uk THT Direct: 0845 12 21 200

Registered office: 314-320 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP

Tel: 020 7812 1600 Email: info@tht.org.uk

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In this leaflet you'll find information on different sorts of condoms, how to use them, where to find them and tips for common condom problems.

Used correctly, condoms are very good at stopping unwanted pregnancies and many sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (the virus that can lead to AIDS). So whether you're new to condoms or not, this booklet will help you get the most from them, so that you can really enjoy your sex life.

How safe are condoms?

Condoms are made to strict standards, with a very low failure rate when used correctly. Instructions on how to use them come inside the pack. If they break or come off it's usually because of something the user did.

Other forms of birth control offer no protection against sexually transmitted infections – but condoms do. Some people use condoms together with other birth control methods for added contraceptive protection and to protect against infections.

Condoms sold in the UK should carry one or both of these symbols  , meaning the condom is of a good enough quality to use. The wrapper carries a 'best before' date; a condom shouldn't be used after this. But if there's no alternative any condom is better than none – but keep checking during sex that it's OK.

Which condom is best?

Condoms come in different sizes, thicknesses, flavours and are made of rubber (latex or polyisoprene). There's the more common 'male condom', but also the 'female condom'. Try various sorts to find what's best for you. Any condom should only be used once.

Latex or polyisoprene?

Most condoms are made of latex (a kind of rubber). One brand (called Avanti Ultima) is made of polyisoprene (a latex-free rubber).

Advantages of polyisoprene condoms:

- Useful for people allergic to latex
- Not as tight
- They feel softer and more stretchy

Disadvantages include:

- More expensive (up to £2 or more each)
- Not sold in the many places or varieties that latex condoms are

Smaller or bigger?

Penises come in different sizes; so do condoms. There's a 1.5cm difference between the smallest and largest condom. Too small and a condom feels too tight and can split; too big and it's more likely to come off. Shop around for the best fit. Smaller condoms are labelled 'trim' or 'snug fit', larger ones 'XL', 'XXL' or 'Magnum'. Avanti Ultima condoms are the largest and least tight. Not all shops sell different sizes – the internet has the biggest selection.

Regular strength or thicker?

The thinner the condom, the more sensation. For more reassurance some people prefer thicker condoms (sometimes called 'extra strong' or 'ultra strong'). These were once recommended for anal sex but we now know that regular (thinner) condoms are just as safe.

With or without spermicide?

Condoms often come covered in 'spermicide' (something that kills sperm). One spermicide called Nonoxynol 9 (or N-9) irritates the skin inside the body, making it easier to pick up infections (including HIV). A condom with Nonoxynol-9 is better than no condom but where possible it should be avoided (the packaging says if condoms contain it).

Standard or novelty condoms?

Condoms come shaped, coloured, flavoured, with or without teats at the tip to collect semen. All these are usually OK for sex but some novelty condoms may not be. The packaging should say so.

'Male' or 'female' condoms?

Regular ('male' latex) condoms rely on men being prepared to use them but 'female' condoms (large, baggy and made of polyurethane; sold in the UK as Femidoms) give control to the woman.

Advantages of Femidoms:

- The woman is in charge. She puts it inside her vagina before sex, possibly some time before (instructions are in the pack)
- Men might prefer them because it means they don't have to wear a latex condom

Disadvantages of Femidoms:

- More expensive than male condoms (about £1.50 each)
- Some say they are too noticeable or more likely to break

Lubricant

Using lubricant means more comfort and safety. Not using any, not using enough or the wrong sort makes condoms more likely to break or come off.

Don't rely on spit – it dries quickly, causing condoms to break. Lubricant should go on the condom-covered penis, and in and around the vagina or anus. Avoid getting lubricant on the penis before the condom goes on – this makes it more likely to slip off.

Condoms are made weak by oil-based lubricants such as skin cream, Vaseline, massage oil, baby oil, hair gel, cream or oil-based food from the kitchen. Water-based lubricant should be used (eg KY jelly, Wet Stuff, Astroglide) and can be bought in chemists and supermarkets.

Femidom female condoms are the only ones it's safe to use oil-based lubricants with as they're made from polyurethane (which, unlike rubber, isn't weakened by oil-based products).

You can also buy silicone lubricant – it stays slippery for longer and is safe to use with all condoms (but can stain clothes or bedding, and damage sex toys made of silicone). Add more lubricant during sex to reduce the risk of a condom breaking or slipping off.

Where to get condoms

Condoms are for sale from: chemists, supermarkets, late night garages/shops, machines in bars/nightclubs.

A large variety can also be bought on the internet – eg. www.freedoms-shop.com

Free condoms are available from: GUM (sexual health) clinics, doctors' surgeries, family planning centres, sexual health centres, including Terrence Higgins Trust offices.

If travelling abroad, take condoms and lubricant with you. In many places they are hard to find or poor quality.