

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Condoms come in lots of colors, textures, lengths, widths, and thicknesses. The most important thing when choosing a brand is that the condoms be made of latex or polyurethane (plastic). Both of these are effective in preventing STDs, HIV and pregnancy. Avoid using animal skin (or “natural”) condoms, which prevent pregnancy but aren’t as effective in preventing all STDs, including HIV.

Also, while male condoms are more popular, female condoms, which are inserted into the vagina, are also an option when male condoms can’t be used.

MAKING THE PURCHASE

You can buy condoms in lots of places: drugstores, grocery stores, convenience stores, dispensers in bathrooms, and so on. There are also online retailers, including specialty condom sites as well as online drug stores and groceries that can mail them to you. Testing centers and health clinics may have free condom supplies available as well. Many people feel nervous about going to the store to buy condoms, especially the first time. They may worry about what the cashier or others in the store might say or think. But remember: lots of people buy condoms every day; the only thing you can really tell about a person buying condoms is that they are taking responsibility for their sexual health. Many people feel nervous about going to the store to buy condoms, especially the first time. They may worry about what the cashier or others in the store might say or think. But remember lots of people buy condoms every day and the only thing you can really tell about a person buying condoms is that person is making a smart decision.

INSPECTION

Check the label and condom before using it. Don’t use it if it is past the labeled expiration date or if it is over five years past the manufacture date. Also, if the condom is ripped or looks dry, brittle, stiff, or sticky, it shouldn’t be used. Keeping a few spares on hand is a good idea in case one rips while being opened or put on.

HANDLING

Condoms should be kept in a cool, dry place to prevent breakage or leakage. To open the package, it should be torn gently on the side (not with teeth or scissors, which could tear the condom itself). Pull the condom out slowly (with care) to prevent ripping.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LUBRICANT

Using a pre-lubricated condom, or applying a small amount of water-based lubricant inside and outside the condom can help prevent rips. Oil-based lubricants (for example petroleum jellies, body lotions, mineral or vegetable oils) should not be used with latex condoms because they can cause the latex to break down, reducing or eliminating the condom’s effectiveness.

PUTTING A CONDOM ON CORRECTLY

The condom should be put on before any genital contact. Some STDs can be transmitted without intercourse, through genital (skin-to-skin) contact. Also, pre-cum can contain semen and STDs (including HIV) so you need to wear a condom the whole time from beginning to end, each and every time.

- The rolled condom should be placed over the head of the penis when it is hard.
- Pinch the tip enough to leave a half-inch space for semen to collect. Holding the tip, unroll the condom all the way to the base of the penis.
- The condom should fit snugly – but not too tight – so that it won’t slide off or break during intercourse.
- If you start to put on a condom inside-out, don’t use it. Throw it away and use a new one. You’ll know it’s inside out because it won’t roll down the length of the penis easily.
- If the condom rips at any time, throw that one out and use a new one.

REMOVING A CONDOM

The most common mistake is not using condoms from start (of sexual contact) to finish (after ejaculation). Immediately after ejaculation, hold the base of the condom (so it stays in place and semen cannot spill out), and slowly withdraw the penis – while it is still hard. The condom should be wrapped in tissue and thrown away in the garbage (not in the toilet as it may clog).

WHAT IF THE CONDOM BREAKS?

If you feel the condom break at any point during sexual activity:

1. stop immediately
2. withdraw
3. remove the broken condom, and
4. put on a new condom.

Condoms can break, slip, or leak if they're not put on and taken off properly. If the condom breaks, emergency contraception can be used to prevent pregnancy. Emergency contraception can be started 5 days after unprotected sex, but the sooner it's started the better it works. Emergency contraception does not protect against STDs.

PROTECTING YOURSELF DURING ORAL SEX

It is possible to get HIV and other STDs during oral sex if your partner is infected, although the risk is generally lower from oral sex without a barrier (e.g., condom or dental dam) than from intercourse (vaginal or anal sex) without a barrier. Still, it's a good idea to use a barrier when giving oral sex to prevent fluids (like semen, blood, vaginal fluids) from entering your mouth. For oral sex on a penis, you should use a non-lubricated latex or polyurethane (plastic) condom. For oral sex on a vagina or anus, you should use a latex barrier (like a natural rubber latex sheet, dental dam or cut-open condom that makes a square) between your mouth and your partner's genitals.