

External Condoms

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is a condom?

A condom is a sheath made of latex, polyurethane or natural membranes (usually lamb intestine), which is placed over the penis prior to sexual contact and worn after ejaculation when the penis is removed from the orifice (vagina, mouth, anus). Condoms are available in a variety of sizes, textures and thicknesses and come with or without lubricant or spermicide coating. When used correctly and consistently, male latex condoms are highly effective in preventing pregnancy and sexual transmission of HIV and other STIs (i.e. gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomoniasis and hepatitis B). Condoms also reduce the risk of STIs transmitted primarily through skin (i.e. herpes, syphilis, and hpv) when affected areas are covered by a condom. Condoms may be used as a primary pregnancy prevention method, as a backup method, or with another contraceptive method to provide STI protection.

How effective is a condom in preventing Pregnancy?

- The perfect use failure rate is 2% (if a condom is used consistently and correctly with each act of intercourse).
- The typical use failure rate is 18% (includes people who forget, do not use it with every act of intercourse or used improperly).

The most common reason for condom failure is not using a condom consistently and correctly with every act of intercourse. Latex and polyurethane condoms provide the same protection against

pregnancy. Polyurethane is suggested for those individuals who are allergic to latex. The use of spermicidal condoms is no longer advised, as they give no further protection against pregnancy and/or STIs. In fact, nonoxynol-9 spermicide may enhance transmission of HIV by irritating the vaginal mucosa and destroying vaginal flora. Natural membrane condoms may not provide the same level of protection for STIs as they contain tiny pores that may allow the passage of viral particles.

How do condoms work?

Condoms act as a barrier, reducing the risk of pregnancy and transmission of STIs. They prevent the passage of sperm, bacteria, and viruses between partners.

How do you use them?

It is a good idea to learn how to use a condom long before it is needed. Practice with models: fingers, bananas or a penis. Buy condoms in advance, carry them with you but keep out of sunlight and heat. Do not store in a wallet for more than one month. Do not use a condom that feels brittle or looks discolored. Try new condoms to find favorite size, scent and texture and to add variety. Check expiration date on condom carefully. Put condom on before entering your partner and before close genital, oral, or anal contact.

Steps to Putting on a condom:

- Squeeze the package and feel for the air bubble. This ensures the package is intact.

- Open the package carefully, squeeze condom out, avoid tearing with fingernails, teeth, etc.
- Before putting on the condom, check to see which way the condom unrolls (rolled side out).
- If uncircumcised, pull back foreskin before unrolling the condom on penis.
- Pinch the condom at the tip. If the condom doesn't have a receptacle tip, leave ½ inch of space at the end & squeeze out the air. This leaves room for ejaculation.
- Unroll the condom all the way down to the base of the penis (down to hair). Note – a condom can be put on a penis that is partially but not fully erect.
- If the condom is placed on the penis inside-out (the condom is not able to roll down), don't flip through and unroll. Get a new condom because there could be fluids that contain sperm and STIs on the outside of the condom.
- Smooth out air bubbles. Make sure the condom is the correct size. A condom that is too big is likely to slip off. A condom that is too tight will decrease sensation or break more easily.
- Put lubricant on the outside of the condom after it has been rolled on to the penis. Use water based or silicone based lubricant with latex condoms. Do not use baby oil, edible oils like olive, corn, massage oils, Vaseline, petroleum jelly, hand creams, whipped

cream, vaginal yeast creams or other prescription creams or ointments.

- If a condom is used for anal intercourse, replace with new condom prior to vaginal or oral entry. Also change the condom if going from oral to vaginal/anal sex, between partners, and if sharing sex toys. This prevents the spread of bacterial and viral infections, including STIs.
- Immediately after ejaculation (before loss of erection) hold the rim of the condom against the shaft of penis and remove the condom-covered penis from vagina or anus.
- Remove the condom from the penis and inspect carefully for any breaks.
- Wrap in tissue and dispose of used condom. Do not flush down the toilet. Do not reuse.

What if a condom breaks or slips off?

If condom falls off, slips or breaks, wash areas exposed to body fluids with soap and water. If the condom is being used for pregnancy protection, apply vaginal spermicidal foam and consider using Emergency Contraceptive pills (e.g. Plan B) as soon as possible. These are available at Health Services Pharmacy or any local pharmacy. Consider STI testing if appropriate. If frequent breakage occurs, consider using a different brand or size.

Source: <http://bedsider.org/features/307-condoms>