



Condoms

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). Latex condoms are available in at least 2 sizes, in a variety of textures and thicknesses and come with or without spermicidal coating. Two brands of polyurethane condoms are currently available in the US. When used correctly and consistently, male latex condoms are highly effective in preventing sexual transmission of HIV and can reduce the risk for other STIs (i.e. gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomonas). Polyurethane condoms have not been studied in regards to STI protection but are believed provide protection similar to latex condoms. Natural membrane condoms may not provide the same level of STI protection. Condoms may be used as a primary contraceptive method, as a back up method, or with another 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 15% (includes those couples 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. **We no longer suggest the use of spermicidal condoms, 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.

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 into the vagina, anus, and mouth.

How do you use them?

Both women and men should learn how to use a condom long before it is needed. Practice with models: fingers, bananas or a man's penis. Buy condoms in advance, carry them with you but keep out of sunlight and heat. Do not store in a wallet for too long. 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 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:

- Check the expiration date. Squeeze the package and feel for the air bubble. This ensures the package is intact.
- Open package carefully, squeeze condom out, avoid tearing with fingernails, teeth, etc.
- Before putting on the condom, check to see which way the condom unrolls.
- If uncircumcised, pull back foreskin before unrolling condom
- Pinch out 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 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 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 condom is 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.
- Use water based or silicon based lubricant with latex condoms. You can use Astroglide, water and saliva, KY jelly, Vagisil and Vi-Amor. Never put lubricant inside the condom. Do not use Aldara (Imiquod - a cream for treating genital warts), baby oil, edible oils like olive, corn, massage oils, Vaseline, petroleum jelly, hand creams, whipped cream, vaginal yeast creams.
- 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.

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- Immediately after ejaculation (before loss of erection) hold rim of condom against shaft of penis and remove 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 in 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 available, apply vaginal spermicidal foam and start using Emergency Contraceptive pills (ex: Plan B) as soon as possible. These are available at Health Services or at most local pharmacies without a prescription for those over 17 years of age. If frequent breakage occurs, consider using a different brand or size.