

Male and Female Condoms

Male and female condoms reduce the risk of pregnancy and of getting or passing on a sexually transmissible infection (STI).

How effective are they?

When used correctly, male condoms are up to 98% effective at preventing pregnancy, with female condoms up to 95% effective. With both male and female condoms the biggest risk factor for unplanned pregnancy is failure to use the devices.

Condom care

Many people are concerned about a condom breaking. This most commonly happens when the condom is old or damaged by heat, when a water-based lubricant isn't used, or when people are inexperienced in using condoms. Some essential condom tips:

- Always check the expiry date on the condom packet before use
- Learn how to put on and take off a condom before using one for the first time (practising in private can help!)
- Store condoms in a dry, cool place away from direct heat (ie not in your car or wallet)
- Never use a condom more than once
- Only use water-based lubricant with condoms - oil-based lubricant can weaken the condom and increase the risk of breakage



Male condoms

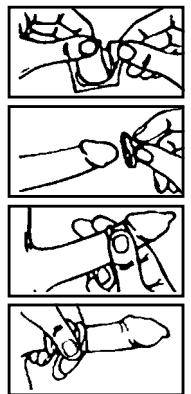
The male condom is currently the only contraceptive device available for men in Australia. Condoms are made of latex or polyurethane and fit closely over an erect penis to collect semen and stop it entering the vagina.

They also provide protection against STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. As some STIs can be passed on through skin to skin contact, it's important to remember that condoms only protect the area of skin they cover.

How to use a condom

Getting intimate? It's a good idea to talk to your partner about condoms early on in any relationship. Keep some condoms handy, and put one on before any genital contact occurs (as sperm can leak from the penis before ejaculation, and pre-cum can also transmit infection).

1. Gently open the packet and take out the condom (be careful not to tear it with your teeth, fingernails or rings). Check that the condom is around the right way by unrolling it slightly (it will only unroll one way).
2. Squeeze the air out of the tip of the condom with your thumb and forefinger and unroll it all the way down the erect penis.
3. Use a water-based lubricant on the outside of the condom or around the partner's genital area (while condoms are generally already lubricated, using extra lubricant helps to enhance pleasure and prevent breakage).
4. Occasionally check that the condom is still on during sex. If it comes off, withdraw the penis and put a new condom on before sex continues.
5. After sex, withdraw the penis while it is still hard, holding onto the condom at the base of the penis so that no semen leaks out.
6. Take off the condom, wrap it up and throw it in the bin, without letting it touch the partner's genital area.



Advantages

Condoms:

- reduce the risk of getting or passing on STIs
- have no health risks (polyurethane condoms are available for people who are allergic to latex)
- are widely available from FPWA, pharmacies, vending machines and supermarkets at a low cost, with lots of varieties to choose from (including non-lubricated for those who are allergic to the lubricant generally used on condoms).

Disadvantages

Condoms:

- must be put on before any genital contact occurs to be effective
- can reduce sensitivity for some people (using a small drop of water-based lubricant on the tip of the penis before rolling the condom on can improve sensitivity).

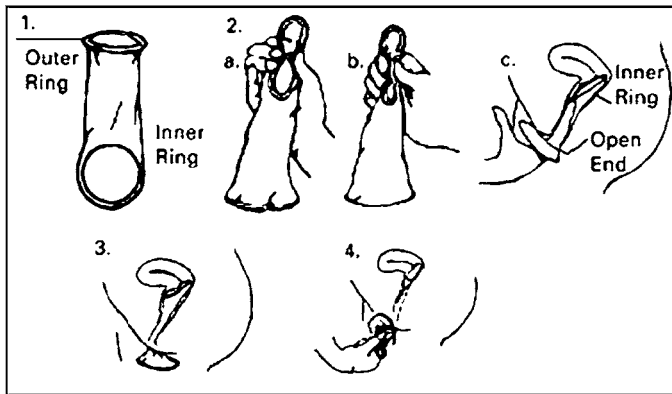
Female condoms

The female condom is made of polyurethane and fits inside the vagina to prevent semen from entering. It consists of an inner and outer ring: the inner ring helps to insert the condom, while the outer ring remains outside the vagina and is pushed flat against the labia (vaginal lips).

Female condoms are available from FPWA and some pharmacies. Although called female condoms, some men use them as a loose fitting condom for anal sex.

How to use the female condom

The female condom can be inserted any time before sexual intercourse.



1. Carefully open the condom packet. The outer ring at the open end covers the area around the opening of the vagina. The inner ring is used for insertion and to help hold the condom in place (you may want to insert extra lubricant inside the condom).
2. a) Hold the inner ring between your thumb and middle finger. This will give you a firm grip and narrows the inner ring to ease insertion.
b) Squeeze the ring together.
c) Push the ring up into your vagina as far as it will go (as you would a tampon). When inserted correctly the inner ring should not cause any discomfort.
3. The outer ring should remain outside your vagina.
4. To remove the condom twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside, then pull gently. Wrap the condom and throw it in the bin.

Advantages

Female condoms:

- reduce the risk of getting or passing on STIs (possibly

providing greater protection than male condoms as they cover part of the vulva, lessening skin-to-skin contact)

- offer an alternative to male condoms and use can be initiated by women
- can be bought without a prescription
- are better than male condoms for sensation because they warm to the body
- don't require withdrawal immediately after climax
- are suitable for people who are allergic to latex
- can be inserted well in advance of sex if preferred.

Disadvantages

Female condoms:

- provide potential for the penis to slip outside the condom between the condom and the vaginal wall
- are more expensive than male condoms and are not readily available.

What to do if condoms fail

Emergency contraception (EC) can be used to prevent pregnancy when sex has occurred without contraception or when contraception has failed (eg condom breakage). It is available over the counter at pharmacies. The sooner EC is taken after unprotected sex the more effective it is at preventing pregnancy, and its effectiveness is significantly increased when taken within 24 hours. It can be taken up to 120 hours (5 days) after intercourse, however, effectiveness decreases as time passes.

Having unprotected sex can put you at risk of STIs. A doctor or FPWA clinician can organise testing for you.

Condoms and sex toys

Sharing toys puts you at risk of getting or passing on STIs. To keep yourself and your partner safe, cover sex toys with a condom every time you use them. Use a new condom each time you switch between the vagina, anus and mouth, or if sharing toys with a partner.

How to use the female condom from *The Female Condom Factsheet* is reproduced with permission from Family Planning NSW.

Practising safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).



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sexhelp@fpwa.org.au

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