

When should we stop using condoms?

When to stop?

So when should you stop using condoms? This is a question that comes up for many couples at some point in their relationship, and one without an easy answer.

Condoms protect against many sexually transmissible infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS and pregnancy, so the decision to stop using them shouldn't be taken lightly.

Even though it can be difficult, before you make a decision about whether or not to continue using condoms it's a good idea to talk openly with your partner about your relationship. You may both have different feelings around safe sex and condom use, and it can help to get these feelings out in the open.

Remember there are no right or wrong answers – every relationship is different. The most important thing is that both partners are honest with each other when it comes to discussing their thoughts and feelings.

Think about things like:

Are you able to communicate easily?

Can you talk about things like safe sex and how it affects your relationship?

Do you trust one another?

Is there a chance your partner might have unsafe sex with someone else, putting you at risk of an STI?

Are you honest with one another?

If they did have sex with someone else, do you think they would tell you?

Discussing these issues may make you feel uncomfortable, but try to be as open and honest as you can. If you are having trouble broaching the subject, reading this information together may make it easier to begin talking.

Other things to consider

Think about what kind of relationship you have. Some people find that monogamy works for them (having sex with one person), while others prefer an 'open' relationship (having sex with more than one person).

It's important to be clear on the type of relationship you have, and for both people in the relationship to be happy with the decision. People often think they are in an exclusive relationship, but this isn't always the case.

Talk about and agree on what is acceptable behaviour in and outside the relationship. You may decide not to have sex outside the relationship, or that if you do it will be safe sex. If you think there is a possibility that one or both of you might want to have sex with someone else, you may decide you want to continue using condoms.

Ask yourself if your partner is pressuring you to stop having safe sex, or if it is something you want to do. It's important that you do what feels right for you, not what someone else wants you to do.

Is there a possibility you or your partner might have an STI? It's a good idea to talk about this. Often people are reluctant to tell their partner if they think they have an infection. Ask yourself if you would want your partner to tell you if this was the case. Would it affect your decision about whether or not to use condoms? Being honest with each other helps both parties to make an informed decision.

If pregnancy is an issue for you, have you considered what form of contraception you will use in place of condoms? It may be helpful to see a doctor to discuss your contraceptive options.

So you've decided to stop using condoms

If you do decide to stop using condoms, it's important that you both get tested for STIs first. Many STIs don't have any symptoms, so you or your partner could have one and not know it. If left untreated, many STIs have serious health consequences, such as infertility for both men and women.

Before getting tested, think about how you might handle the results if they are not what you expect. What effect would it have on your relationship?

Once you've been tested, talk about how you are going to stay safe from now on. Have a clear understanding of what safe sex means for you.

Remember there may be times when using condoms is still a good idea, for example if using sex toys. For more information on condoms and sex toys see FPWA's information sheet 'Safe Sex in Toyland'.

If you need to protect against pregnancy, make sure you have another effective form of contraception organised before you stop using condoms.

In the future

Relationships and the people in them change over time, and what you both decided initially about condom use may alter at some point. It's important to occasionally talk about what you've decided and check whether your decision is something you both still agree on.

It's a good idea to be responsible for your own sexual health. You may decide you want to continue to be tested for STIs from time to time for your own piece of mind. For women, having a Pap smear may be an opportune time to also have an STI test. This is a choice for individuals to make.

More information

Some people find it useful to talk to someone about issues around safe sex and STIs. Phone the Sexual Health Helpline on 9227 6178 for a confidential chat.

Some couples also find counselling to be beneficial at some stage in their relationship. The Roe Street Centre for Human Relationships specialises in issues around relationships, sexuality and sexual problems. Phone 9228 3693 for more information.

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



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sexhelp@fpwa-health.org.au

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