

CONDOMS

A condom, also called a rubber, is a thin, disposable covering, usually made of strong rubber or latex, which fits snugly over an erect penis. It acts as a barrier that stops sperm from entering the vagina. Condoms are used to protect both partners from sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS) and to prevent pregnancy.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING CONDOMS

- **USE ONLY LATEX CONDOMS.** Condoms made of natural skin may allow some viruses to pass through (such as AIDS virus or hepatitis virus).
- Open the package at one end to avoid tearing the condom. Push it out by squeezing the bottom of the package so your fingernail will not rip the condom. Unroll a fresh condom over the erect penis before any sexual contact.
- Lubricants can be used to make the condom more slippery during sex. Lubricants are applied to the condom after it is rolled onto the penis. Use only water-based lubricants like KY Jelly. Oil based lubricants like Vaseline, baby oil, or Crisco can melt latex rubber so don't use them. It may be easier to buy lubricated condoms.
- Leave the small end (reservoir) loose at the tip of the condom. At the time of ejaculation, the semen that comes out of the penis is caught in the end of the condom. This stops the semen from going into the vagina.
- Remove the penis from the vagina soon after ejaculation. The condom could easily slip off as the erection lessens. If the condom slips off, sperm or viruses might escape into the vagina. Before the penis is pulled out of the vagina, hold the rim of the condom firmly to prevent the condom from coming off in the vagina and spilling semen.
- Use a new condom each time you have sexual contact. This is very important. Keeping condoms in a wallet for more than a month is not a good idea because warm damp surroundings can damage the latex rubber. Old condoms break more easily so check the expiration date.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CONDOMS

Advantages:

- Condoms are 90% reliable in preventing pregnancy. When used with a vaginal spermicide (cream, foam, or gel placed in the vagina to kill sperm that may escape from the condom), their effectiveness increases to 95%. Spermicidal condoms are available; these have the spermicide included with the condom.
- Condoms are the best contraceptive available that also helps prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Condoms are widely available to anyone. They can be bought without a prescription at your local drug or grocery store.

Disadvantages:

- A condom must be put on the penis BEFORE any genital contact. If both you and your partner are not able to exercise this willpower EVERY time, this is not a good form of birth control for you. Even if you forget just one time, you could get pregnant. Remember condoms are your only protection against infection including AIDS except for abstinence (not having sex).

MALE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BIRTH CONTROL

- Condoms are the only contraceptive that allows the male partner responsibility for birth control instead of the female partner.
- Never assume your partner is using some form of birth control; if you don't know, ask her. If she isn't using birth control, use a condom. Even if she is using birth control, condoms are the only method that provides good protection against infections. Use a condom to protect against disease even if your partner is using another method of birth control.

The best relationships are based on good communication. If you and your partner haven't spoken seriously yet about your relationship, now is the perfect time to start. Making babies is easy, but raising them is one of life's most difficult challenges. Think about it.

Adapted from David W. Kaplan, MD, and the staff of the Adolescent Medicine Center, The Children's Hospital, Denver, CO.

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