

Condoms

The condom, also known as a "rubber," is a latex sheath that is worn over the penis during intercourse. It prevents pregnancy by preventing the man's semen from entering the woman's vagina. Using latex condoms with spermicidal foam also helps reduce the risk of being infected with sexually transmitted infections (also called sexually transmitted diseases).

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of using condoms alone is approximately 90%. The effectiveness is increased when the condom is used in combination with a spermicide, a chemical which kills or immobilizes the sperm cells.

The effectiveness has been shown to be as high as 98% when used correctly and used every time. Using spermicidal foam alone is only 70-80% effective. Some condoms are coated with a small amount of spermicide, but it is safest to have a contraceptive foam barrier right at the cervix. Condoms will fail to prevent pregnancy or the transfer of disease when they are not used consistently. They can only provide protection when they are used.

CHOOSING CONDOMS

Use latex condoms only. Natural membrane condoms do not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. All condoms are not the same. If you are not satisfied with the type of condom you are using, it is important to try different brands and styles until you find a condom that works for you.

People who have an allergy to latex have options when it comes to condoms. The newest type of condom is made of polyurethane plastic. It has a looser fit, a longer shelf life and reportedly transmits more heat across the condom. The brand to look for is Avanti, which is made by Durex.

Female condoms are another option for people with latex allergy because they too are made of polyurethane rather than latex. You can check out the Reality Female condom site at www.femalehealth.com.

Keep a supply of condoms handy. Both men and women should keep condoms accessible. Store them in a cool, dry place, as extremes of heat and cold can damage condoms. Condoms should not be kept in trunks or glove compartments of cars, or in wallets or pockets for extended time. Body heat can deteriorate the latex.

USING A CONDOM

1. *Open the package carefully to remove the condom.* Condoms can be damaged if the package is not opened carefully (so avoid using scissors or teeth).
2. *Gently press out air at the tip of the condom before putting it on.* An air bubble may cause the condom to tear or come off. Hold the tip of the condom to squeeze out the air. This leaves room for the semen after ejaculation.
3. *Put the condom on before the erect penis is placed in or near the partner.* Condoms should be put on during foreplay before any pre-ejaculatory fluid is released.
4. *Unroll the condom to cover the entire erect penis.* When unrolling a plain-end condom, leave a one-half inch space at the tip of the penis for collecting ejaculated semen. When using a receptacle-end condom, it is not necessary to leave additional space at the end of the condom.

5. *Keep holding the tip of the condom and unroll it onto the erect penis all the way down to the hair.* When unrolling the condom, smooth out any air bubbles to decrease the chance of breaking. *If using a lubricant, use one that is water-soluble.* Never use petroleum-based jellies such as Vaseline, because they can deteriorate the latex rubber of the condom.
6. *Using a spermicide enhances protection when used with the condom.* An applicator full should be inserted into the vagina prior to intercourse. If the condom tears or comes off in the vagina, add another applicator full of spermicide into the vagina to help prevent pregnancy.
7. *After intercourse, withdraw the penis and the condom together while the penis is still erect.* Do this by holding onto the condom at the base of the penis while withdrawing. Failure to withdraw before the penis becomes soft increases the risk that semen may leak out of the condom at the base of the penis.
8. *Use each condom once and throw it away.* Since condoms are non-biodegradable, discard them in waste containers, not toilets.

If the condom breaks, tears or slips off during sex, there may be a chance that either partner has been exposed to an STI. You and your partner can make appointments to be tested at University Health Service by calling 275-2662. For couples concerned about pregnancy, a woman may want to consider using Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs). Also known as "the morning after pill," they are available at University Health Services and should be taken within 120 hours after unprotected intercourse, the sooner the better. Call UHS at 275-2662 to find out if you should take ECPs.

PURCHASING CONDOMS

Condoms are available at a number of sites on campus. Condoms can be purchased at the UHS clinical offices. Free condoms are often available in the waiting room in the UHS River Campus Office. Resident Advisors can come to the UHS Health Promotion Office for a small supply for their halls. Condoms can also be purchased from snack vending machines in the residence halls on the River Campus. Condoms are also available for purchase at the Common Market and Corner Store.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of gynecological and contraceptive services. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) or with one of the women's health nurse practitioners for gynecological care and to discuss contraceptive options. All visits to UHS are strictly confidential.

LINKS

To learn more about condoms, you can visit:

Planned Parenthood
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc/condom.htm>