

Condoms

Condoms are used during sex as a barrier to prevent the transmission of potentially harmful viruses and bacteria, including HIV, which are present in the genital fluids of both men and women. They also stop the transmission of viruses present on the skin, like the ones that cause herpes and genital warts, also spread through sexual intercourse. When condoms are used during vaginal penetration, they also protect against pregnancy by stopping the semen from entering the woman's body.

Choosing Condoms

The condoms need to have received homologation from the Ministry of Health and Consumption and bear the EC mark, which is the European Community equivalent. These two marks will show that they are good quality condoms. Condoms also need to be marked with an expiration date. If this date has passed, they need to be thrown away.

Condoms come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, thicknesses, textures, flavors and colors. Although the standard size will fit most men, smaller and larger condoms are also available. It is important to use a brand that fits well. Some condoms are only designed with the idea of enhancing sexual pleasure, and for this reason they will not function as an effective, protective barrier.

Condoms and anal sex

Normally it is recommended to use extra-strong condoms (for example, Durex Extra Strong) for anal penetration. However, a recent study has shown that standard condoms are just as effective as extra-strong ones, always and when they are used correctly.

Using condoms correctly

Condoms come rolled up in a plastic or foil wrapper. When opening the wrapper, it is good to make sure that you do not damage the condom. Put the condom on after the penis is hard, but before starting penetration. Once the penis is hard, unroll the condom from the top of the head of the penis down to its bottom, pushing out all the air from the tip of the condom as you go.

The end of the condom may be very flat or shaped like a nipple. In either case, it is important to leave enough space at the end so that the semen gets trapped there. If air is left in the end of the condom, it may break during ejaculation.

It is necessary to be careful, given that if not used correctly the condom may come off or break during penetration.

After ejaculating, withdraw the penis right away before it goes soft. Hold on to the base of the condom when withdrawing the penis. Condoms must never be used more than once.

Choosing a lubricant

Lubricants are used to ease both vaginal and anal penetration. The vagina usually lubricates itself when a woman becomes sexually aroused. For this reason you may not need to use additional lubricants, unless the vagina feels dry. However, lubricants should always be used for anal sex.

Most condoms come pre-lubricated, but probably not sufficiently for anal penetration or for vaginal.

Condoms should be used with water-based lubricants such as KY, Lubric, Brushaway, Silk, Liquid Silk, Maximus, Forplay or Wet Stuff. Oil-based lubricants such as body lotions, massage oils or Vaseline should never be used with condoms because they can weaken the latex and cause the condom to break. Lubricants must be applied to the outside of the condom (once it has been put on), and to the entrance of the rectum or vagina, but never inside the condom for this may cause it to slip off during penetration.

Spermicides

Some condoms are coated with a spermicide to help prevent pregnancy. However, some spermicides can cause irritation in the rectum or vagina and increase the chance of a possible transmission of any infections which might be present. The excessive use of a spermicide called nonoxynol-9 (found in Durex Extra Safe, Mates Natural, Mates Conform and Mates Ultra, as well as in some lubricants), is not recommended for this reason and is best avoided.

Latex allergies

Most condoms are made of latex. If you are allergic to this substance, you may use Durex Avanti instead, which is made of plastic rather than latex and can therefore be used with oil-based lubricants.

Where to buy condoms?

Condoms are sold in pharmacies, shops, supermarkets and also on the Internet. They can be obtained freely at non-governmental organizations which work in the field of HIV prevention. Also, many gay bars or clubs distribute condoms, although not all. For this reason it is better to always carry condoms on you.

Tips on using condoms

If you have difficulties using condoms, like breakages, irritation of the genital region, or you find it difficult to negotiate their use with your partner, you can talk to a doctor or ask for an appointment with the sexual health unit of your health center. Health professionals are trained to give tips and support on sexual health.