

Male and Female Condoms

What are male and female condoms?

Two methods of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Male and female condoms should not be used together.

How do they work?

In three ways:

1. For male contraception, by collecting the male's semen in the end of the condom, so the sperm does not enter the vagina and uterus.
2. For female contraception, by collecting the male's semen in the top of the condom, preventing the sperm from entering the vagina and uterus.
3. For STI protection, by acting as a physical barrier. They are most effective against infections such as HIV, Hepatitis B, Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea, which are transmitted by the exchange of infected bodily fluids.

When should they be used?

1. When another effective contraceptive is not being used.
2. When there is the slightest doubt either partner may have, or be at risk of having, an STI.
The condom must be put on or inserted before **any** contact with the partner's genital area.

'Dental' Dams

A dam is a thin latex sheet placed over (any part of) the body for safer oral sex. They are often used in conjunction with condoms and other forms of contraception.

THE MALE CONDOM

Male condoms approved for use in Australia are made of fine, strong, latex rubber, which are available in a variety of sizes and styles. Also some condoms are now available which are made from polyurethane rather than rubber; these can be used by people allergic to latex.

How effective is it?

Very: if used correctly every time, it is 95%-99% effective at preventing pregnancy. There is a possibility of the condom breaking or slipping off, in which case emergency contraception for the woman is available*. Most people using condoms will have a mishap at some stage, but if you are in situation where this is happening frequently, it is important to see a doctor or a nurse. There may be a problem with the type of condom you are using, or your technique, that can be remedied.

How is it used?

- Always use a new, lubricated condom. If more lubricant is needed, use only water based lubricants such as KY jelly, Lubafax and Lifestyle. Oil based lubricants (e.g. Vaseline) may weaken and break a latex condom. It is important that condoms are not stored in warm places, such as a car glove box, or carried in a wallet for more than a month, as this can also cause them to break more readily. It is not recommended to add spermicide.
- Check the 'use by' date and open the packet, being careful not to tear the condom with fingernails, jewellery or teeth.
- Do not test the condom. Unrolling the condom before fitting may damage it and will also make it more difficult to put on.
- Hold the teat between thumb and forefinger to expel air, and then unroll the condom onto the erect penis before any sexual contact. If the penis is not fully erect, the condom may slip.

- After ejaculation, the penis should be withdrawn before the erection subsides. Hold the base of the condom while withdrawing to prevent leakage of the semen.
- Dispose of the condom carefully, and best not in the toilet, as they can block the sewerage system.

Side effects?

Almost none – a tiny fraction of the population may be allergic to the rubber or the lubricant.

Where to obtain them?

Chemists, Family Planning clinics, some supermarkets and petrol stations, university and hotel vending machines. No prescription is necessary. All condoms purchased in this way meet Australian safety standards but Internet purchases may not.

THE FEMALE CONDOM

Female condoms have been available in Australia since early 2000. There is only one brand world wide, but it is known by different names. In Australia it is simply called 'the Female Condom'. Brand names in other countries are Femidom and Reality.

What is it?

The female condom is a sac made of polyurethane designed to fit inside the vagina and act as a barrier contraceptive. Polyurethane does not contain latex and is very strong, but fine and soft and allows good transfer of body heat. The condom has a soft, flexible inner ring that helps with insertion and positioning of the condom. There is a larger flexible outer ring that sits outside the vaginal opening. The female condom is prelubricated.

How effective is it?

The female condom is 95% effective in preventing pregnancy. If the condom breaks (very rare), or is displaced, see your doctor for emergency contraception*.

How is it used?

- Each condom comes packaged with pictures as instructions for insertion. The first time you use one it may be confusing, so it is important to give yourself some time and privacy.
- After removing the condom from the packet, hold it with the open end down and hold the inside ring at the top.
- Squeeze the inside ring and push the condom up into the vagina as far as you can. Put your finger inside the condom and push the inner ring up until it is above the pubic bone. The pubic bone can be felt as a hard lump by putting your finger inside your vagina and moving it up and to the front.
- The penis needs to be guided with a hand into the open end of the condom. Because the condom is well lubricated and slippery, it is easy for the penis to go either underneath or on top of the condom, making it useless as a barrier. A couple may not realise this has happened, so check the position of the penis.
- Unlike male condoms, any sort of lubrication, including an oil-based one, can be safely used with female condoms.
- Remove the condom by twisting it (to stop semen from leaking) and pulling it out.
- A new condom must be used each time you have sex.

Side effects?

None are known, although some complain of the condom making a rustling sound during intercourse and of discomfort for either partner from the rings.

Advantages of the female condom

- It is the only female-controlled barrier method which gives protection to the whole vagina.
- It provides more protection to the vulva (skin outside the vagina) than a male condom.
- There is no risk of latex allergy.
- It may be inserted up to eight hours before intercourse and can be used at all times of a woman's menstrual cycle.
- A man does not need to have a full erection for a female condom to be effective.
- The penis may stay inside the vagina after ejaculation without the additional risk of the condom slipping.

Where to obtain them?

Female condoms are available from Family Planning Victoria, in person or by mail order. Some agencies such as community health centres and student health services may also have them.

*Emergency contraception can be used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. To be effective, it must be taken within 120 hours of either failure of a condom, or failure to use a contraceptive. The sooner after unprotected sex it is taken, the more likely it is to be effective. Emergency contraception is available without a prescription over the counter from pharmacies. See the FPV Emergency Contraception pamphlet for more detailed information.



FAMILY PLANNING VICTORIA

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