Condoms - how to use a male condom

condom-couple.jpg

By practising safer sex, you can protect yourself from an unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. This means always wearing a condom, but first it's a good idea to know how to use one and what to do if something goes wrong.

How do condoms work?

There are wide range of condoms and female condoms available, with varying levels of thickness, texture, material, size, colour and taste. They work by forming a barrier between the penis and anus, vagina or mouth. This prevents fluids (blood, semen or bodily fluids) being passed into, or on, each other.

The most popular type of condoms is made from a thin latex (rubber). However, if you are sensitive to latex you can use polyurethane or polyisoprene condoms instead.

Why is it important to wear a condom?

If someone has an STI this can be passed on during unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, or by sharing a sex toy. Vaginal sex without a condom can also result in pregnancy, even if it's just the once.

Wearing a condom is the best option when it comes to practising safer sex, especially because some STIs have no symptoms in the early stages, for example chlamydia.1 This means that you and your partner may not know you have an infection until much later on, which can affect your fertility and overall health. Similarly, one of the earlier stages of HIV infection may also not reveal any symptoms.2

When do you need to use a condom?

You should use a condom during any sexual activity where you may be at risk of sharing bodily

fluids. The main purpose of other contraceptives such as the Pill or contraceptive injection is to prevent pregnancy, but they won't stop you from catching an STI.

How do I use a condom?

A condom is less effective if the penis touches the vagina or anus before a condom is worn, or if it slips off during sex. Some people prefer to use a condom with added lubrication to make sex feel more comfortable, but more importantly this helps prevent condoms from breaking.

Condoms page.jpg

Copyright AVERT

There's no harm in practising how to put a condom on beforehand and this can help you both to feel more at ease when the time comes. You will also find instructions on the packet, but in general you should follow these rules:

- Check that the condoms are in date, in good condition and have the CE mark on it – this means they've been tested to European safety standards.
- The man needs to have an erection before the condom is put on. Always put the condom on before the penis touches a woman or man's genitals.
- Open the packet carefully so that there's less chance of ripping it. There's usually an arrow on the packet to guide you in the direction you should open it. Avoid using your teeth and be careful with sharp fingernails or jewellery.
- Condoms come rolled up and need to be placed on top of an erect penis. Some people like to use a little bit of extra lubrication to help it go on easily. If you do this, use a water-based lubrication, rather than vaseline, hand cream or anything that contains oil - these can all break the condom.
- Pinch the teat at the end of the condom before you start to roll it down the penis. By doing this you will be helping to squeeze any air bubbles out and this will prevent friction that can cause condoms to break. It will also help you know if the condom is on the right way.
- Roll the condom down to the base of the penis. If it's on correctly it will roll downwards easily (or you may be able to feel the texture of the outside of the condom if it's ribbed). If you're not sure then use a new condom and try again. This is important even if the man hasn't ejaculated because

there can still be sperm on the penis (pre-cum).
- Only take the condom off when the penis is withdrawn completely from the body and while the penis is still erect. Tie a knot in the end of the condom, wrap it up, and throw it away in a bin (don't put it down the toilet as it can block up your plumbing).
- Always use a new condom if you have sex again.

Remember: Avoid using two condoms at once or a female condom at the same time - this can cause friction and they're more likely to split or slip off.

What should I do if a condom breaks?

Condoms are highly effective if used consistently and correctly, so it's very unlikely that one will break. Wearing one is really important, but if a condom does split, break or slip off, squeeze out as much semen as you can and avoid washing inside your vagina or anus (douching) as this can spread infection further or cause irritation.

You should always use a condom for oral sex too. It carries a low risk of HIV, but this risk is increased if there are any cuts, sores or inflammation on the man's penis or a woman's vagina, if you have a throat infection or there is any damage or bleeding in your mouth.3

Most sexual health professionals will advise you to have a sexual health test around 10 days after unprotected sex or if a condom breaks (or earlier if you are worried about any symptoms) and then again around three months later. This is because different STIs are detected at different times. In the meantime, avoid sexual contact or practice safer sex by always wearing a condom.

What should I do if a condom breaks and my partner is HIV-positive?

If a condom breaks and you know you are having sex with someone who is living with HIV or who doesn't know their HIV status, you will need to visit a sexual health professional as soon as you can. You may be offered post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment.4 This is a month-long treatment of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that can reduce your chances of becoming HIV-positive.

PEP has a high success rate; however, it is not a replacement for condoms. PEP is a powerful drug that has side effects and it's not an option available to everyone.

How can I talk about condoms with my partner?

Some people feel embarrassed bringing up the subject of using condoms, especially in the early stages of a relationship. But it's important to remember that the other person won't think any less of you for wanting to practise safer sex – and if they do, it's worth asking yourself if they are the right person to be with.

Talking about condoms with your other half isn't about you saying that you don't trust them – it's as much for them as it is for you. Be firm and confident in your decision and prepared for any excuses that you may hear. If someone loves and respects you, or wants to get closer to you, they will want you to enjoy sex and feel safe at the same time.

Photo credit: ©iStock.com/KatarzynaBialasiewicz. Photos are used for illustrative purposes. They do not imply any health status or behaviour on the part of the people in the photo.

Photos are used for illustrative purposes. They do not imply any health status or behaviour on the part of the people in the photo. - See more at: /sex-stis/safer-sex-hiv/alcohol-drugs#sthash.fAtGV5TY.dpuf

- 1. NHS Choices (2013) 'Chlamydia'
- 2. Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) (2014) 'Stages of HIV infection'

- 3. Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) (2014) ‘Oral sex and HIV’
- 4. Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) (2014) 'Post exposure prophylaxis’

Last updated: 24 April 2017

Last full review: 01 May 2015

Next full review: 01 May 2018