

Female condoms - how to use a female condom

Female condom



The female condom is a contraceptive sheath (or pouch) that can help you stay in control of your sexual health and prevent an unplanned pregnancy and [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#), including [HIV](#).

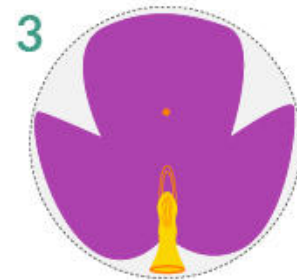
How to use a female condom



1 Check the expiry date & take the condom out of the packet carefully.



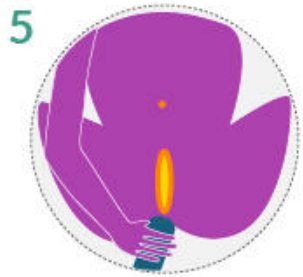
2 Squeeze the sides of the inner ring at the closed end of the condom between your fingers.



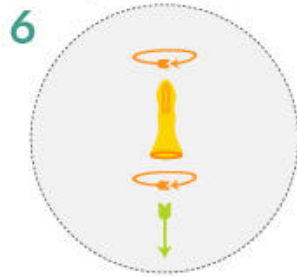
3 Find a comfy position – standing with one foot on a chair, squatting or lying – so that you can insert the condom into your vagina with your finger like you would a tampon.



4 Put the condom in as far back as possible. The outer ring will hang about an inch outside your body.



5 When you are ready to have sex use your hand to guide your partner's penis into the condom.



6 Twist the outer ring and pull it out to remove it.

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It's a good idea to understand why it's important to wear a condom and when you need to wear one. Some women prefer to use a female condom as it means not having to rely on the man to wear the condom.

Although female condoms are not as easily available as the [male condom](#) (and can be more expensive), you can usually get them from sexual health clinics or a healthcare professional. Some shops sell them, but you may have to go online.

What types of female condom are available?

The female condom is available in 130 countries and is known as the second generation female condom (FC2) – it also has the following names depending on where you live: Femidom, Dominique, Femy, Myfemy, Protectiv, Elegance, Della and Care.

The FC1 was made of polyurethane, but many people complained that it was noisy and put them off during sex. This was replaced by the FC2, which is made of less noisy synthetic latex called nitrile. There are new designs of female condom being produced across the world.

How do female condoms work?

The female condom is worn loosely inside the vagina and is 17cm (6.5 inches long). They work by preventing bodily fluids and semen from entering the body and womb and, when used correctly, will help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.¹

Female condoms can be put in up to eight hours before sex, compared to male condoms which are put on just before sex or during foreplay. This can help you feel more prepared and in control of using contraceptives if you are going to have sex.

How to use a female condom

You will find instructions in the packet and you can also get advice about how to use a female condom from a sexual health professional.²

1. Check the expiry date and that it appears in good condition.
2. Take the female condom carefully out of the packet so that there is less chance of it ripping (don't use your teeth and be careful with sharp fingernails or jewellery).
3. Sit, squat, lie or stand in a position you find the most comfortable, similar to how you would insert a tampon. Squeeze the smaller ring at the closed end of the condom and insert it into your vagina as far as it will go, making sure that it doesn't twist. The large ring at the open end of the female condom will cover the area around the vaginal opening – it is normal for this part to hang outside your body.
4. When you have sex the penis should enter into the female condom, rather than between the condom and the side of your vagina. You can help guide your partner into you to ensure it goes in the right place.
5. After sex, twist the large ring to prevent semen from leaking out and gently pull the female condom out. You can then wrap the condom up and throw it away in the bin (it can block up your plumbing if you put it in the toilet).
6. Always use a new female condom each time you have sex.

Remember: Avoid using a female condom at the same time as a male condom. This can cause friction and they will be more likely to split.^{3 4}

What to do if a female condom breaks

It is unlikely that a female condom will break, especially if used correctly. However, female condoms can break for the same reasons that a male condom can, for example if there is a tear in the condom before or during sex it's not put in place properly or is in poor condition.

There's also a risk of semen spilling into your vagina as it's removed. If something does go wrong try not to panic.⁵ Try Squeeze out as much of the semen as you can and avoiding washing inside your vagina or anus (douching) as this can spread infection further or cause irritation.

It is advised that you have a sexual health test about 10 days later, (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. Until then, avoid sexual contact or practise [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 had sex with someone who is [living with HIV](#), you will need to visit a healthcare professional as soon as you can. You may be offered post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment.⁶ This is a month-long treatment of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that can reduce the risk of HIV establishing in your body.

PEP has a high success rate; but, it is not a replacement for condoms. PEP is a powerful drug that has side effects and not everyone can have the treatment.

How to talk about condoms with your partner

If you want to share the responsibility with your partner when it comes to safer sex then a female condom is a good way of helping you feel in control of your sexual health. You may feel embarrassed talking about condoms, but the consequences of not using one could be far more serious.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using one form of contraceptive over another. It's a

good idea to arm yourself with as much information as you can about your options before you discuss them with your partner. Try and have this conversation before having sex, rather than in the heat of the moment.

It can take practice to use a female condom, but once you've got the hang of it many women feel reassured because it can be put in several hours ahead of sex.

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- [1. NHS Choices \(2015\) 'Female Condoms'](#)
- [2. Family Planning Association \(FPA\) \(2014\) 'Condoms \(male and female\)'](#)
- [3. Terrence Higgins Trust \(THT\) \(2014\) 'How to use a femidom'](#)
- [4. Cervical Barrier Advancement Society 'Other female condom products' \[accessed May 2015\]](#)
- [5. Open Doors \(NHS\) 'What to do if a condom breaks' \[accessed May 2015\]](#)
- [6. Terrence Higgins Trust \(THT\) \(2014\) 'Post exposure prophylaxis'](#)

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