

# Female condoms - how to use a female condom



## FAST FACTS

- Female condoms are a thin pouch that can be inserted into the vagina before sex, forming a barrier to protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, and unplanned pregnancy.
- Female condoms can also be used to protect you and your partner during anal sex.
- Some men and women find the inner and outer rings of the female condom can make sex more pleasurable.
- Using a female condom and a male condom at the same time can cause them to break - one is enough!
- It's very rare for a female condom to break - but if it does, don't panic, there are things you can do to minimise the risk of STIs and pregnancy.

Female condoms are an alternative to [male condoms](#). Instead of going on the penis, they go inside the vagina to prevent [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) including [HIV](#) and pregnancy. They can also be used inside the anus to protect from STIs.

Some people prefer to use a female condom as it means not having to rely on their partner to wear a condom. If you've never used a female condom it's good to understand - and even better to try - all your options. You might be surprised by what works best for you.

## What is a female condom?

A female condom is a thin pouch which is put inside the vagina to prevent unplanned pregnancy and STIs including HIV. It can also be put inside the anus to protect from HIV and other STIs.

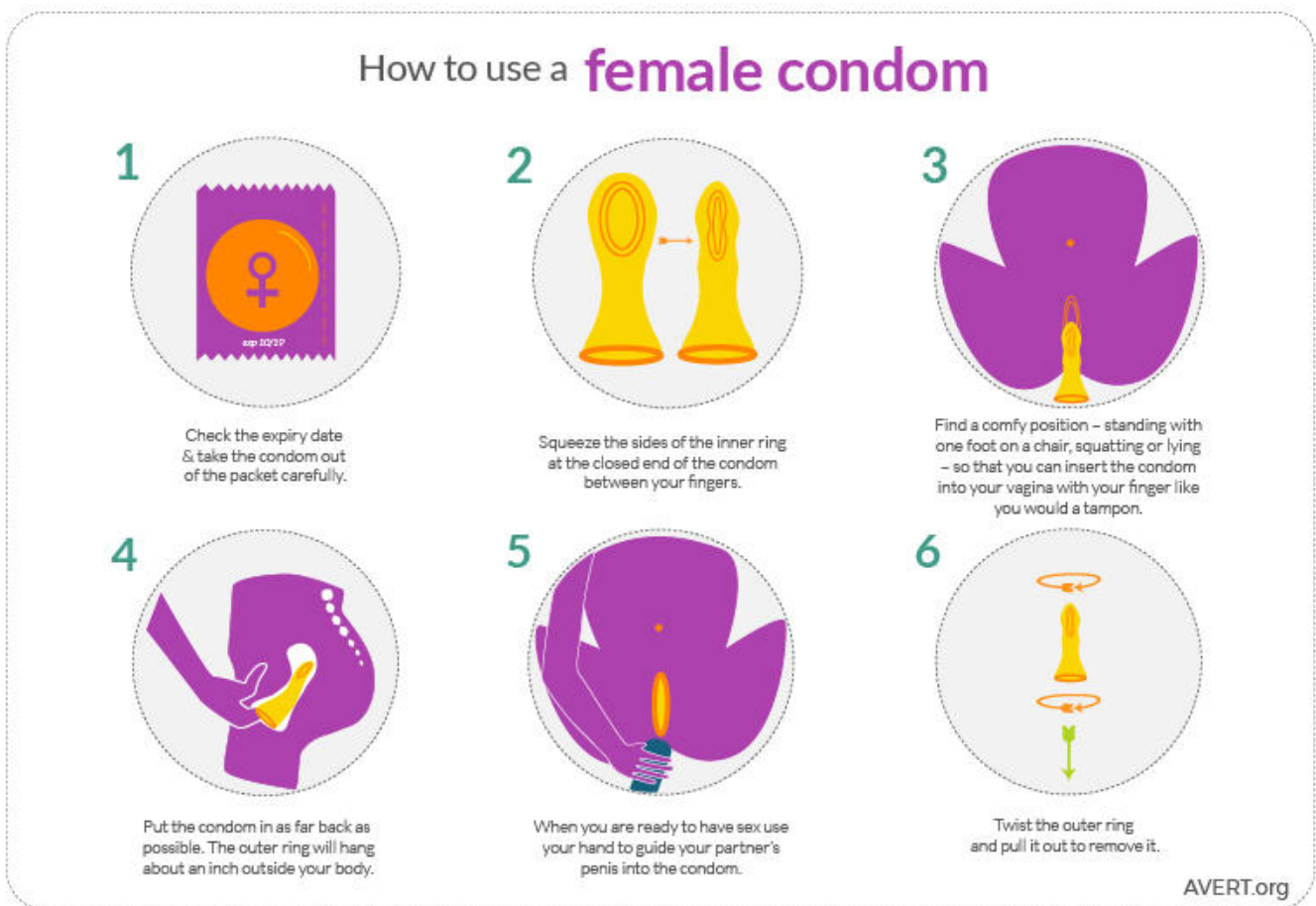
# How does a female condom work?

The female condom is worn inside the vagina or anus and works by creating a barrier which prevents bodily fluids and semen from entering the body. When used correctly, it will help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.

## How to use a female condom

Though they may seem daunting at first, female condoms are easy to use with a bit of practice.

### Vaginal sex



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. Here are the steps:

1. Check the expiry date and that it appears in good condition.
2. Take the female condom carefully out of the packet so as not to rip it (don't use your teeth or scissors, and be careful with sharp fingernails or jewellery).
3. Sit, squat, lie or stand in a position you find 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 sit 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.
6. Always use a new female condom each time you [have sex](#).

Remember don't double up! Using a female condom at the same time as a male condom can cause friction and the condoms will be more likely to split.

## Anal sex

If you're using the female condom for [anal sex](#), you can either insert it into the anus, or you can put it onto your partner's penis in order to insert it into the anus gradually.

The outer ring should sit outside of the anus - which then makes it easier to remove afterwards. Do not try to remove the inner ring before insertion as this risks breaking the condom.

Make sure you use plenty of lubricant, because the anus doesn't create its own. This will reduce the likelihood of passing on STIs and HIV too.

Female condoms aren't approved for anal sex by any government authority, but they will protect against STIs and HIV.

## Female condoms Vs Male condoms

Female condoms have advantages and disadvantages when compared to male condoms and ultimately you'll know what's right for you. Here are a few things you might want to think about when assessing your options:

### Effectiveness

Female condoms can be just as effective as male condoms when used consistently and correctly.

### No interruptions

Unlike male condoms which are put on just before sex or during foreplay, you can insert the female condom ahead of time (up to eight hours before sex). This means no interruptions once you decide to get down to it. It also means the penis can be put into or near the vagina or anus before it's fully erect.

So, not only does this enable you to take control of your own sexual health - it also won't slow you down in the heat of the moment.

### Latex or nitrile

While most (but not all) male condoms are made of latex, female condoms are made from a soft plastic material called nitrile. This is hypoallergenic, meaning female condoms won't irritate sensitive genital skin.

In addition, whereas male condoms can't be used with oil-based lubricants because these may cause the latex to break, female condoms can be used with any type of lubricant - whether oil, water or silicone!

## Size matters

Female condoms are larger than male condoms and don't fit snugly around the penis. This means they give your partner's penis more breathing room, which some people find more comfortable and can make it easier for the man to maintain an erection. Many men prefer using female condoms for this reason.

## Maximum pleasure

Using female condoms can make sex more pleasurable for men and women.

During vaginal sex, the female condom's inner ring may stimulate the tip of the penis, and the external ring can rub against the vulva and clitoris - this can feel great for both of you!

You can also ask your partner to put the female condom in for you as part of foreplay.

## And relax

Because the female condom does not depend on an erection to stay in place, your partner does not have to withdraw immediately after ejaculation (cumming) as they would with a male condom. The female condom can be removed when it suits you both, just make sure that no semen is spilt!

This means that you can breathe easy and relax after sex, and just enjoy the moment together.

## Know your body

Some women may feel uncomfortable with the idea of inserting a female condom into their vagina. But doing this will help you get a better understanding of your body, helping make sex more enjoyable as you learn what feels good. Don't let uncertainty or shyness stand in the way of protecting yourself against STIs, HIV and pregnancy!

## What to do if a female condom breaks

It's unlikely that a female condom will break, especially if used correctly. However, if a female condom does break, or leak when removed from the vagina, or if the outer ring moves up inside the vagina - or if something else goes wrong like the penis slipping between the condom and the vagina during sex - then there are a few simple things you can do:

- withdraw the penis immediately
- remove as much semen (cum) as you can
- avoid washing inside your vagina or anus (douching) as this can spread infection further or cause irritation
- if you've been having vaginal sex go to the bathroom and pee to flush away any semen that may be near your urethra
- if you haven't been using any other contraceptive to prevent pregnancy, you may want to consider accessing emergency contraception within 72 hours of having sex.

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're worried about any symptoms) and then again around three months later. This is because different STIs will become detectable at different times after infection.

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

Your HIV positive partner will be able to tell you if they are on regular treatment and have been virally suppressed for at least the last six months. If this is the case, the risk of HIV transmission if a condom breaks is extremely unlikely. You may however both still decide to get tested for other STIs.

If a condom breaks and your HIV positive partner is not on regular treatment or is unsure of how well they are doing, you'll need to visit a sexual health professional as soon as you can. You may be offered [post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\)](#) treatment. This is a month-long treatment of antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that reduce your chances of becoming HIV-positive.

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

If you're in a relationship with someone who is living with HIV, using [pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#) could be another option to protect you from the risk of HIV transmission. However it won't protect you from other STIs and unplanned pregnancy.

## Where are female condoms available?

Although female condoms are not as easily available as male condoms (and can be more expensive), you can usually get them from sexual health clinics or a healthcare professional. Some shops and pharmacies sell them, and they are available online.

The female condom is available in 130 countries. There are different types of female condoms, but some common brand names include Femidom, Dominique, Femy, Myfemy, Protectiv, Elegance, Della and Care.

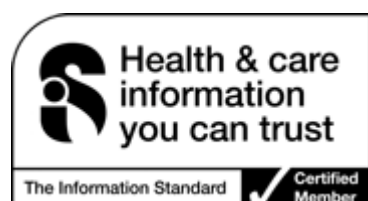
There are new designs of female condom being developed and produced across the world each aiming to be more comfortable and user-friendly.

## How to talk about condoms with your partner

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.

*Photo credit: ©flickr/PATH Global Health*



## Sources:

[NHS Choices 'Female condom'](#)

[Planned Parenthood 'Female condom'](#)

[Open Doors 'What to do if a condom breaks'](#)

[Terrence Higgins Trust \(THT\) \(2014\) 'Post exposure prophylaxis'](#)

[FemaleCondoms4All 'Research'](#)

[AIDSMap 'Female condoms for anal sex'](#)

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