

Condoms - how to use a male (external) condom



FAST FACTS

- A male (external) condom will protect you and your partner against STIs and unplanned pregnancy if you use one correctly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Using water-based lubricants makes condoms more comfortable and sex more enjoyable.
- Condoms rarely break, but if they do, don't panic there are simple steps you can take to minimise the risk of pregnancy and STIs.

Here you can find out how to use a male (external) condom correctly to protect you from the risks of [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#), including HIV, so you can have [more enjoyable sex](#). They will also protect you from unplanned pregnancy during vaginal sex. You might also want to take a look at our [female \(internal\) condom](#) page for information on how to use those.

What is a condom?

Fluids such as semen, vaginal fluids and blood can pass on HIV and STIs. An external or male condom is a thin piece of rubber worn on the penis during vaginal, anal or oral sex. It creates a barrier to stop these fluids from entering the body.

Most male condoms are made from latex (rubber). If you are sensitive to this you can get condoms made from polyurethane or polyisoprene or you could try internal condoms which are hypoallergenic so they don't irritate the skin. Condoms are often available free from sexual health clinics or healthcare professionals, and are sold in many shops and pharmacies.

Why should I use them?

They work really well.

When used correctly, condoms provide excellent protection against HIV, pregnancy and most STIs. In fact, they are the only type of contraception that also stops you getting or giving STIs. A few STIs can be passed on simply through skin-to-skin contact (for example genital warts), but condoms also cut the risk of many of these.

If you use a condom, you can relax and enjoy sex knowing that you and your partner are protected.

Top tips for using condoms

- Condoms only offer protection against STIs, HIV and pregnancy if you use them every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Never double up. Using two condoms at once (either internal or external) does not make sex safer. Instead it increases the risk of the condom breaking or slipping off.
- Use a new condom every time you have sex or if you move between vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Before you begin

- Check the condoms are within the date on the packet and make sure you use ones with a mark (FDA, CE, ISO or Kitemark) that guarantees they meet safety standards.
- Do not use animal skin condoms as they do not protect against STIs.
- The condoms should be close by when you need them. So keep them in your wallet or next to your bed, but not in a pocket or anywhere they can get hot, crumpled or damaged.
- Open the packet carefully so the condom isn't torn or broken. Don't use your teeth or scissors and be careful with sharp fingernails or jewellery.

Putting on a condom

Using a condom is simple, but you may want to practice a few times before you have sex to get the hang of it.

- The penis needs to be erect before the condom is put on, but do not wait too long. Always put the condom on before the penis touches the partner's genital area or mouth.
- The condom will be rolled up. Place it on top of the erect penis and pinch the teat at the end. This will get rid of any air bubbles and make sure there is room for the semen (cum).
- Roll the condom down to the base of the penis, it should roll easily. If you've started putting it on the wrong way or you're not sure then take it off and try again with a new condom. Even if the man hasn't ejaculated (cum) there can still be semen on his penis, so use a new condom.
- You can make putting on a condom part of foreplay - keep touching and kissing as you put it on or get your partner to do it for you.

How to put on a **condom**

1



Check the expiry date & take the condom out of the packet carefully. Don't use scissors or your teeth!

2



Pinch the air out of the top of the condom. Make sure it is not inside out – the rim should be on the outside.

3



Put the condom on top of the erect penis. Put it on **BEFORE** it touches a partner's mouth or genital area.

4



Roll the condom down to the base of the penis. Wear it the whole time you are having sex.

5



Take the condom off once the penis has been withdrawn completely but while it is still erect. Don't wait around too long to pull out as this risks semen spilling out, or the condom slipping off.



Make putting on a condom part of the fun! Ask your partner to put it on for you, and keep stimulating each other as the condom goes on.

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How to remove a condom

- After sex, hold the condom in place at the base of the penis and withdraw while the penis is still hard (erect). Only take the condom off when the penis has been withdrawn completely. Most men lose their erection soon after sex so don't wait too long to pull out the penis or there is a risk semen will spill out or the condom will slip off.
- Always use a new condom if you have sex again, or if you're going from anal to vaginal or oral sex.

What to do if a condom breaks

It's very rare for a condom to break when it is used properly but if it does split, break or something else goes wrong like the condom slips off, there are some simple things you can do:

- withdraw the penis immediately
- remove as much semen (cum) as you can
- gently wash the outside of your genitals - 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
- if you haven't been using any other contraceptive to prevent pregnancy, you may need to access emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy. This should be done within 72 hours of having sex

- if you were having oral sex, spit out any semen (or swallow it) and rinse your mouth with water but do not brush your teeth for at least one hour.

Get tested

Visit a health facility. They will probably advise you to have a sexual health test around 10 days after exposure (or earlier if you're worried about any symptoms) and then again around three months later. This is because different STIs become detectable at different times after infection.

If your partner has HIV

If your partner is on regular treatment and their viral load has been undetectable for at least the last six months, there is no risk of HIV transmission (but this should not stop you both from getting tested for other STIs).

If your partner is not on regular treatment or is unsure how well they are responding to treatment, you need to visit a sexual health professional as soon as possible. You may be offered [post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\)](#) treatment. This involves taking antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) for a month to reduce the chance of becoming HIV-positive. PEP has a high success rate, but it is not a replacement for condoms, it is a powerful drug with side effects and is not appropriate for everyone.

If you're in a relationship with someone who is living with HIV, you might consider using [pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\)](#) to protect you from HIV transmission, but don't forget, this will not protect you from other STIs or pregnancy.

Which type of condom should I use?

A well-fitting condom should roll all the way down to the base of the penis and feel comfortable, not too tight or so loose that it risks slipping off during sex. Just like clothes, you might need a different size depending on the brand. You can try out different sizes of condoms to find the one that's best for you or your partner. It's a myth that a penis can be too big for condoms - they are very stretchy.

There is a huge variety of condoms available. You have a choice of textures (ribs or bumps can increase sensation for both partners), thickness, flavours (which can make oral sex more fun) and colours.

It's a good idea to use a lubricant (lube) too:

- it makes it more comfortable to have sex with a condom and increases pleasure
- it reduces the risk of the condom breaking, especially during anal sex

Only use water-based lubes designed for sex. Oil-based ones (such as vaseline, massage oils or hand cream) may weaken or break the condom. Try putting lube on the outside of the condom or inside and around the vagina or anus. But don't put it on the inside of the condom or on your bare penis, this will make the condom slip off.

Safer sex for trans people

Whether you've had lower surgery or not, the best way to protect yourself and your partner against [STIs and HIV](#) is to use a condom (either internal or external) with water-based lubes.

If you've recently had surgery, you should be extra careful. Your skin may not have healed and can bleed easily, making it easier for you to acquire or pass on HIV.

How do I talk to my partner about condoms?

You may feel embarrassed to talk about using condoms, especially at the beginning of a [relationship](#), but don't let that stand in the way of protecting yourself against STIs, HIV and pregnancy. Talking to your partner about condoms isn't a sign that you don't trust them - it's a way of showing you care and want to protect you both.

If your partner refuses to use a condom don't feel pressured into having unprotected sex - remember you always have the right to decide whether or not to have sex.

Try and have the conversation beforehand rather than in the heat of the moment, then you can feel safe to relax and enjoy sex.

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Sources:

✓ NHS Choices 'Condoms'

Planned parenthood 'Condom'

NAM 'How to use condoms and lubricant'