

Effectiveness

The male latex condom is 98% effective at preventing pregnancy when used every time and correctly. When it isn't used every time and correctly, it is only 88% effective. Almost all condom failures happen because the condom breaks or slips. That's why it's so important to learn how to use condoms **correctly!**

EC: Don't forget about Emergency Contraception (EC)! If a condom breaks or slips off and you are worried about pregnancy, EC can help prevent pregnancy up to 5 days after having sex!

If a Condom Breaks or Slips Off

Don't panic! If you feel a condom break or slip off while you are having sex, stop immediately and pull out. Don't continue until you have put on a **new** condom. And always keep a supply of EC on hand, just in case you need it.

"My boyfriend had heard that condoms can break or slip off, so we were pretty nervous when we first started using them. But we haven't had any problems. I think if you know how to use them, they work great."

**— Michelle, age 26
student, mother of one**

Common Questions

Do condoms come in different sizes?

Yes! Condoms come in different lengths, widths, and thickness. It is important to get the right fit! Condoms that are too big can slip off and condoms that are too small can break more easily. Try different sizes until you find the right condom for **you**.

What if I am allergic to latex?

If you are allergic to latex, you can use a natural membrane (lambskin) condom, or a plastic male or female condom. Both natural membrane and plastic condoms are effective at preventing pregnancy, but the natural membrane condom does **not** protect against STDs.

Are condoms more effective if they are used with foam?

No. Condoms are not more effective when used with spermicidal foam. Also, some chemicals in the foam can cause irritation in the vagina, making it easier for viruses like HIV and hepatitis to be transmitted. You can use foam with condoms, but it is just as effective to use condoms without foam.

I've tried condoms before, and they dull sensation. Is there anything I can do?

Yes! You can make sex more pleasurable by using a water-based lubricant like K-Y Jelly with your condom. It also increases sensation to put a small amount of condom before putting it on.

To learn more about other reversible birth control methods:

Check out our brochures on:

The Pill
Depo Provera ("The Shot")
Emergency Contraception ("EC")
The IUD
The Patch
The Ring

Check out our website at:

www.kingcounty.gov/health/famplan

To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline
1-800-770-4334 **OR** TTY 1-800-848-5429
For confidential information and referrals

To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:
www.not-2-late.com to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.

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when you
choose the
condom

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What is it?

The condom is a latex, plastic, or natural membrane barrier that fits over the man's penis. It prevents sperm (semen or "cum") from entering the vagina and reaching a woman's egg.

FACT: The latex condom protects against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Getting Started with Condoms

Condoms are very effective when they are used **correctly**, and **every time** you have sex. To get the most positive, worry-free start with condoms, take some time now to learn how to use them correctly:

How to Put On a Condom:

- Pinch the tip of the rolled up condom. This squeezes out the air and leaves room for the semen ("cum").
- Place the condom over the head of the man's erect penis or "hard on".
- Keep holding the tip with one hand, and use the other hand to unroll the condom all the way to the **base** of the penis, where the pubic hair starts.

How to Take Off a Condom:

- After ejaculation ("cumming"), hold onto the base of the condom and pull out of the vagina while the penis is **still hard**.
- Take off the condom **away** from the vagina. Slowly roll it towards the tip of the penis, and pull condom off.
- Throw the condom in the trash, **not** the toilet.

TIP: Try putting some water-based lubricant on the outside of the condom. This helps prevent it from breaking during intercourse, and also increases pleasure for both partners.

What to Expect: Common Side Effects

Most people can safely use condoms with **no** side effects. A small amount of people have allergies to:

- the rubber used in latex condoms
- the spermicides or lubricants used with some brands of condoms

If you feel burning or itching after using a condom, try using condoms without spermicide or lubricants, or try switching brands. If the problem continues, contact your health provider or clinic.

TIP: If you find out that you are allergic to latex, you can try using a plastic condom instead. Because plastic condoms are not as effective as latex condoms, they are mainly recommended for people who can't use latex condoms.

Condom Do's and Don'ts

Do store condoms in a cool, dry place	Don't leave your condoms in the sun —sunlight breaks down latex Don't leave your condoms in a wallet or glove compartment—heat breaks down latex, too
Do check the expiration date on the condom package	Don't use a condom that has expired, or is brittle or sticky
Do open a condom package gently	Don't open the condom package with your teeth
Do use plenty of water-based lubricants	Don't use oil-based lubricants like baby oil, massage oil, lotion or Vaseline - oil breaks down latex

Benefits of Condoms

When used every time and correctly, condoms are a good option for some people. Here are some reasons why both women and men today choose the condom:

- Protects against pregnancy **and** sexually transmitted infections (STDs)
- Very few side effects
- Low-cost and easy to get
- Does not require a prescription
- Can be used as a back up when starting a new hormonal method (like the Pill or Depo)
- Can help a man stay hard (erect) longer, and come less quickly

FACT: The latex condom offers better protection against sexually transmitted infections than any other birth control method.

Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

While the condom continues to be a popular choice for many men and women, it isn't the best fit for everyone. The list below will help you to understand why condoms may not be the best choice for some people:

- You need to have condoms close at hand to use them, and you have to **remember** to use them.
- You need to use a new condom each time you have sex.
- Some couples worry that condoms "break the mood" during sex.
- Some men worry about staying "hard" enough (erect) to use a condom.

Another Option: The Female Condom

The female condom is a condom made just for women. It is made of soft plastic, instead of latex and a woman wears it inside her vagina. One end is closed, and has a flexible plastic ring that holds the condom in place. The other end is open. It rests outside of the vagina, and partly covers the area where the pubic hair is.

Just like the male condom, the female condom prevents sperm from entering the vagina and reaching an egg. But there are some differences, too. The female condom is:

- less effective than the male condom at preventing pregnancy (96% vs. 98%)
- less effective than the male condom at preventing STDs
- more expensive than the male condom

Some men and women still choose the female condom because it is:

- thinner (more sensitive) than the male condom
- safe for people who have allergies to latex
- a good option for women whose partners can't or won't use a male condom
- still much better protection than using nothing at all!

FACT: Use a new condom every time you have sex!