YOUR GUIDE TO

Male and female condoms

Helping you choose the method of contraception that is best for you
Male and female condoms

Male and female condoms are barrier methods of contraception. They stop sperm meeting an egg. A male condom fits over a man's erect penis and is made of very thin latex (rubber) or polyurethane (plastic). A female condom is made of very thin polyurethane. It is put into the vagina and thus it is reversible. It is the only female condom available in the UK.

Questions & Answers

How effective are condoms?

How effective any contraceptive depends on how well you use it and whether you follow the instructions. If 100 sexually active women don't use contraception, 90 to 95 will become pregnant in a year.

Male condom — If used according to instructions it is 99% effective. This means that 3 women in 100 will get pregnant in a year. If it is used according to instructions, more women will become pregnant.

Female condom — carries the CE mark. It has been approved for human use in various countries. It is 95% effective after five years. It is used for women who do not wish to use a male condom.

Can anything make male condoms less effective?

Spills can get into the vagina during sex even if you use a condom. This may happen if:

- The penis touches the area around the vagina before a condom is put on.
- The condom slips.
- The male condom slips off.
- You use low-quality products with less lubricant.
- The female condom gets pushed too far into the vagina.
- The man's penis enters the vagina outside the female condom by mistake.
- The condom gets damaged, for example by sharp fingernails or jewellery.
- Any of these happens, or if you have used sex without using contraception, you can get advice about emergency contraception. (See page 51.)

Where can I get condoms?

You can get male condoms free from a family planning clinic, many sexual health clinics and some GPs. Female condoms are free from some family planning clinics. You can get male and female condoms from a pharmacy or through mail order.
way down the penis.
If it won't go to the base then it's probably on
inside out if so, start again with a new condom as
sperm could now be on the first one.
As soon as the man has 'come' and before the
penis goes soft, hold the condom firmly in place
while pulling out. Do this slowly and carefully so
you do not spill any semen.
Take off the condom, wrap it and put it in a bin.
Do not put it down the toilet.
If you have used one, use a new condom.

How do I use a female condom?
The packet contains a leaflet giving instructions.

Open the condom every time you have sex.
Check the 'use by' date on the packet.
You can open the condom in any way before
sex, but always before the
penis touches the vagina or
genital area. You can open the condom
when you are
lying down, sitting on the bed
or on a chair.

Find the position that suits you best.

Be careful how you
open the condom. A sharp
finger or metal can tear the condom.
Hold the closed
end of the condom and
squeeze the inner
ring between your
thumb and middle
finger keeping your index finger on the inner ring
helps to keep the condom steady.

With your other
hand, separate the
folds of skin (labia)
around your vagina.

Then put the
squeezed ring into
the vagina and
push it up as far as you can.

Now put your
index or middle finger on the
end of the condom, until you feel the inner
ring. Then push the inner ring as far back into the
vagina as it will go.

It will then be lying just above
your pubic bone. (You can feel your pubic bone by
inserting your index or middle finger into your
vagina and curving it forward slightly.)

Make sure that the outer ring lies close aga
against the area outside your vagina (ankyris).

It is a good
eight for the
woman or man to
guide the man's
penis into the
condom to make
sure it does not
enter the vagina
outside the
condom. As the
female condom is
loose-fitting it will move during sex. But you will
still be protected as long as the penis stays inside
the condom.

To remove the condom, simply twist the outer
ring to keep the semen inside, then push the condom
out gently.

Wrap the condom and put in a bin. Do not
put it down the toilet.

Where should I keep condoms?
Always keep your condoms where they cannot be
damaged by strong heat, sharp objects, light or
damp.

How do I find a family planning doctor or clinic?

Contraception is free through the National Health
Service.

- You can find lists of GPs in libraries, post offices
  and advice centres or from helplines, health
  authorities or health boards. Doctors who give
  contraceptive advice have the letter "C" after their
  names.

- You can get details of your nearest family
  planning or sexual health clinic from your
  phone book, health centre, hospital, maternity
  or health visitors' advice centre, helpline, health
  authorities or health board.

- Young people can phone Brook on 0800 036
  023 for details of your nearest Brook clinic
  offering contraceptive advice.

You can find out about all clinics from FPA's
CSES helpline on 020 7937 4044.

Emergency contraception
If you have had sex without using contraception or
think your method might have failed there are two
emergency methods you can use:

- Emergency pills - must be started up to three
days (72 hours) after sex. They are more effective
the earlier they are started after sex.

- An IUD - must be fitted up to five days after sex.

Sexually transmitted infections
Male and female condoms can help protect against
sexually transmitted infections. Male latex condoms
should carry the BSI Kitemark (85 EN 600) and
European CE mark. Diaphragms and caps may also
protect against some sexually transmitted infections.

How FPA can help you
FPA, the National Contraceptive Education Service
(CES) helpline is open Monday to Friday and
provides:

- confidential information and advice on
  contraception and sexual and reproductive health

- details of family planning clinics, sexual health
  clinics and other sexual health services

- a wide range of leaflets

FPA UK
2-12 Penelope Road
London NW9 9NF
Phone 020 7937 4044
9am to 5pm

FPA Scotland
Unit 12
Roxborough Business Centre
Barnhill Road, Edinburgh
Phone: 0845 607 1213
9am to 5pm

FPA Northern Ireland
53 Apsley Street
Belfast BT1 1HJ
Phone: 028 90 325 198
9am to 5pm

FPA Cyprus
21 Lefkara House
31 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9BD
Phone: 0845 609 2132
9am to 5pm

FPA Ireland
Brook Health Centre
108a Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2
Phone: 0845 602 1213
9am to 5pm

Ask FPA for a free copy of the following
leaflets:

- Your guide to contraception (all methods)
- The combined pill
- The progestogen-only pill
- Injections and implants
- The IUD
- The IUS
- Diaphragms and caps
- Natural family planning
- Male and female sterilisation
- Emergency contraception
- After you've had your baby
- A guide to family planning services.

A final word
This leaflet can only give you basic information
about male and female condoms. The information
is based on the evidence and medical opinion
available at the time this leaflet was printed.
Different people may give you different advice on
certain points.
Remember – contact your doctor or a family
planning clinic if you are worried or unsure about
anything.