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 loosely lines it. Femidom is the only female condom available in the UK.

Questions & Answers

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How effective are condoms?

How effective any contraceptive is depends on how old you are, how often you have sex and whether you follow the instructions.

If 100 sexually active women don’t use any contraception, 80 to 90 will become pregnant in a year.

**Male condom** — If used according to instructions it is 98% effective. This means that 2 women in 100 will get pregnant in a year.

If it is **not** used according to instructions, more women will become pregnant.
Female condom — If used according to instructions it is 95% effective. This means that 5 women in 100 will get pregnant in a year.

If it is not used according to instructions, more women will become pregnant.

Some novelty condoms are designed purely for fun, and should not be used for contraception. It will say so on the packet, so check before you use them.

Can anything make condoms less effective?
Sperm 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. (Pre-ejaculation fluid, which leaks out of the penis before ejaculation, may contain sperm)
- the condom splits
- the male condom slips off
- 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 finger nails or jewellery
- you use oil-based products (such as body lotions) with latex condoms. These damage the condom.

If any of these happen, or if you have had sex without using contraception, you can get advice about emergency contraception. (See page 11).

Where can I get condoms?
Male condoms are free from family planning clinics, sexual health clinics and some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics. GPs and practice nurses. You can buy them from a pharmacy or by mail
order as well as from vending machines, supermarkets, garages and other shops.

Female condoms are free from some family planning clinics, sexual health clinics and GUM clinics. You can also buy them from a pharmacy or by mail order. They are not as widely available as male condoms.

**What are the advantages of condoms?**

- You only need to use them when you have sex.
- They help to protect both partners from some sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- There are no medical side-effects from using condoms.
- Male condoms come in a variety of types, shapes and sizes to suit everyone.
- Male condoms are easily available.
- A female condom can be put in any time before sex.

**What are the disadvantages of condoms?**

- Putting them on can interrupt sex.
- A male condom can sometimes slip off or split. Research shows that polyurethane condoms split more often than latex ones.
- Some people are sensitive to the chemicals in latex condoms, though this is rare.
- When using a male condom, the man has to pull out with the condom still on as soon as he has ejaculated. He must be careful not to spill any semen.
- When using a female condom, you need to make sure the man’s penis enters the condom and not between the condom and vagina and...
that the open end of the condom stays outside the vagina.

**Can anyone use condoms?**

Yes, male and female condoms are suitable for most people.

Some men and women are sensitive to the chemicals in latex male condoms. If this is a problem you can use polyurethane condoms.

Men who do not always keep their erection during sex may find it difficult to use a male condom.

Female condoms may not be suitable for women who do not feel comfortable touching their genital area.

**The male condom or the female condom?**

It's up to you and your partner to choose the condom which suits you best. Why not try each of them before making up your mind? You may decide sometimes to use a male condom and other times a female condom.

**Do I need to use spermicide?**

No. If used correctly, condoms are an effective method of contraception and you do not need additional spermicide.

Some male condoms are lubricated with spermicide, a chemical that kills sperm. These types of condom are being phased out as research has shown that the spermicide Nonoxinol 9 (sometimes spelt Nonoxynol) does not protect against sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia and HIV and may even increase the risk of infection. If you can, avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms and don't use additional spermicide as a lubricant.
What about other lubricants?

Condoms come ready lubricated to make them easier to use. Some people also like to use additional lubrication. Any lubricant can be used with male or female polyurethane condoms. If you are using a male latex condom, you should never use oil-based products - such as body oils, creams, lotions or petroleum jelly - as a lubricant. This is because they can damage the latex and make the condom more likely to split. Some ointments can also damage latex. If you are using medication in the genital area - for example, creams, pessaries or suppositories - ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if it will affect latex condoms.

How do I use a male condom?

You will find instructions on the condom packet or in a leaflet inside the pack. You can also ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Use a new condom each time you have sex. Check the 'use by' date on the packet. Be careful how you take the condom out of the packet - sharp fingernails and jewellery can tear the condom.

Find the teat or closed end and squeeze it to get rid of air. This will also help you roll the condom on the right way round.

Put the condom on