

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Condoms provide protection against both sexually transmitted infections (STI) and pregnancy. Lubricants enhance condom use, as they help prevent condom breakage and can make sexual activity more comfortable and pleasurable. There are many different kinds of condoms, and cost varies from brand to brand. If you have never used condoms, you may want to sample different brands to find the kind that suit you and your partner best. Like condoms, lubricants vary in composition and consistency. Experiment to find what works best for you and your partner.

“Male” condoms

A male condom is a sheath designed to snugly cover the outside of a penis. Its tip provides a receptacle to collect semen after ejaculation. Male condoms may be made out of latex, polyurethane or animal membrane. They come lubricated and non-lubricated, with spermicide or without, or with a texture or flavor.

Only polyurethane and latex condoms protect against both STIs and pregnancy. (Condoms made of animal membrane should be used *only* for birth control, as they are more porous.)

Male condoms come in various sizes, shapes and colors. All condom brands made in the U.S. have been FDA approved for use in vaginal, oral, and anal penetration. Beware of “novelty” condoms; these may not be FDA approved for effective protection against pregnancy and STIs.

Because STI transmission can occur before penetration and/or ejaculation, a condom should be put on the penis as soon as it is erect and before contact with a partner’s body. The following steps are important to obtain optimum condom effectiveness:

- Open the wrapper carefully; remove condom.
- Pinch the tip of the condom to release any air and leave room for ejaculate. Air bubbles can result in condoms tearing or falling off.
- With the rolled rim on the outside and the tip pinched, place the condom over the erect penis. On an uncircumcised penis, pull the foreskin back first. Unroll the condom all the way down.
- After ejaculation, hold the condom at the base of the penis and carefully withdraw (ensuring semen does not leak). Used condoms should be tied in a knot and thrown away (not flushed).
- If you have sex again (oral, anal, or vaginal) use a new condom. Condoms should never be reused.



Adding lube increases sensation and also lessens the likelihood of condom breaks

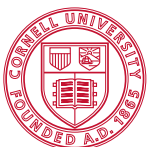
Use condoms before they reach the expiration date (check package). Extreme temperatures, body heat and oil-based lubricants and creams weaken latex. Do not store condoms in a wallet, pocket or car glove box for more than a few days. Use only water-based or silicone-based lubricants with latex condoms.

“Female condoms”

The female condom is a polyurethane “pouch” that was designed to line a vagina in order to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, they have also proven to provide protection from STIs when used in anal intercourse. Female condoms provide excellent protection, and also offer a second alternative for people unable to use latex “male” condoms due to allergies or sensitivities.

A flexible plastic ring is located at each end of the female condom. The ring located inside the “closed” end is inserted and holds the condom in place. The ring at the “open” end hangs just outside the entrance to the vagina or anus.

- To use a female condom, squeeze the inner ring at the “closed” end of the condom and insert it into the vagina or anus. (When used vaginally, this ring will cover the cervix.) The outer ring should remain outside the body holding open the entrance to the condom.
- To dispose of the female condom after use, twist the outside ring to prevent semen leakage, and remove. Dispose in the trash. (Don’t flush it.)
- Like the male condom, the female condom is for one-time use. If you have sex again, use a new condom.



Condom advantages

- Condoms protect against STIs and pregnancy.
- They are easy to use and require very little practice to use correctly.
- Condom reliability is high if used appropriately.
- They are generally less expensive than other safer sex products.
- Condoms are non-prescription and widely available.
- There are generally few side effects.
- The female condom provides an opportunity for individuals to protect themselves if a partner refuses to use a male condom.

Condom disadvantages

- Without proper lubrication, condoms can break.
- Condoms with the spermicide non-oxynol-9 may irritate some people.
- Condoms have a higher failure rate in preventing pregnancy than methods such as contraceptive pills. (This is largely due to incorrect use.)
- Some people find the female condom hard to insert and to remove
- Spontaneity may feel interrupted in order to facilitate condom use.
- Some men report that the use of condoms reduces sexual stimulation.

Some people may think there is added protection by using a female AND a male condom together. This is not the case. You should not use the two condoms at the same time. Friction may result in either or both condoms slipping or tearing or the outer ring of the female condom may be dislodged inside the vagina, denying the proper protection.

Lube is important

By reducing friction (skin on skin, latex on skin, etc.) lubricants add pleasurable sensations to sexual activity. Reduced friction helps lessen the likelihood of a condom break; it also helps prevent irritation, chafing, or breakage of the skin.

Lube is essential for anal intercourse as, unlike the vagina, the anus has no natural

lubrication and is not as expansive. For individuals who have never previously engaged in anal penetration, lubrication is especially important to assure comfort and safety.

Although many condoms come pre-lubricated, it is still advised that you use additional lubricant during sex.

Note: When using a male condom, lubricant should not be applied to the shaft of the penis directly. Although a small amount may be placed in the tip of the condom to increase sensation for the condom wearer, most of the lube should be applied to the outside of the condom to facilitate the comfort of the receptive partner during penetration.

Personal lubricants

Lubricants are available in three different categories:

- Water-based with or without glycerine
- Silicone-based
- Oil-based (*see limitation*)

Water-based are typically considered the safest all-purpose lubricants. They are generally non-irritating and do not cause latex to deteriorate. Women who are prone to vaginal infections may wish to avoid those lubes containing glycerine, as they may potentially encourage yeast growth. Examples of water-based lubes with glycerine are KY Jelly and Astroglide. Liquid Silk is a water-based lube without glycerine. Lubes vary in terms of cost, consistency and flavor, as well as the length of time they remain slippery.

Be careful with “warming” products, as they can cause irritation in some people.

Silicone-based lubes (e.g., Wet Platinum, Eros, ID Millennium) are longer-lasting and safe to use with all condoms (latex or polyurethane) and any latex product (dams, gloves, etc). Many people find the texture of silicone-based lube more pleasurable than water-based or oil-based products. Silicone-based lube is a good choice for anal intercourse. It can also be used safely for sex in or around water. However, some women report slight irritation from silicone-based lubes if not washed off promptly after vaginal intercourse.

Oil-based lubricants (e.g., Men’s Cream, massage oil, etc.) may be okay for masturbation, but they are *not recommended for safer sex with a partner*. The oil leaves a coating on the rectum or vagina that can lead to bacterial or other infections. Oil-based lubes can also break down latex condoms, squares, gloves, diaphragms and other latex products, thus reducing their effectiveness.

Other considerations

Condoms and lubricants are widely available for purchase in pharmacies, grocery stores, convenience stores, and even in some vending machines. Cornell Health’s pharmacy offers a range of products, including water-based and silicone lubricants, at affordable costs.

The sexual health nurses and clinicians at Cornell Health can talk with you about any concerns you may have about your need for protection and/or STI testing. These consultations are free. To make an appointment, call 607-255-5155.