

condoms

Condoms are used during sex to provide a barrier, preventing transmission of potentially harmful viruses and bacteria, including HIV, present in both male and female genital fluids. They also prevent the transmission of viruses present on the skin, such as the ones which cause herpes and genital warts from passing between sexual partners. When used for vaginal sex, condoms prevent pregnancy by stopping the man's semen from entering the woman's body.

Choosing condoms

Condoms which carry the BSI Kitemark (including all *Durex* and *Mates* brands) meet the safety standards of the British Standards Institute. The CE mark is the European Community equivalent. These marks indicate that the condom brand is of good quality. Condoms are marked with a 'best before' date. When this date has passed, throw the condoms away.

Condoms come in a range of shapes, sizes, thicknesses, flavours, textures and colours. Though the standard size will fit most men, smaller and larger condoms are available, and it's important to use a brand that fits well. Some condoms are designed to enhance sexual pleasure only and will not act as an effective, protective barrier.

Condoms and anal sex

It is commonly recommended that extra-strong condoms (e.g. *Durex Ultra Strong*, *Mates SuperStrong*) are used for anal sex. However, a recent research study involving gay couples found that standard condoms are just as effective for anal sex as extra-strong condoms, so long as they are used correctly.

Using condoms correctly

Condoms come rolled up in a plastic or foil wrapper. When opening the wrapper be careful not to tear the condom. Put the condom on after the penis is hard, but before penetration begins. Once the penis is hard, unroll the condom down the shaft and to the bottom of the penis, expelling any air from the tip of the condom as you go. Condoms come with a teat or a plain end. In either case it is important to allow enough room for the semen to be able to fill the end of the condom. If you leave air in the end of the condom, it may break when you ejaculate into it.

Be mindful that condoms can slip off or split during sex, particularly if they are not used correctly.

After ejaculating, withdraw the penis promptly, before it goes soft. Hold on to the base of the condom as you withdraw. Never re-use condoms.

Choosing a lubricant

Lubricants are used to assist penetration in both vaginal and anal sex. The vagina usually lubricates itself when a woman is sexually aroused, and so you may not need additional lubricant for vaginal sex unless the vagina feels dry. However, you should always use lubricant for anal sex. Most condoms come pre-lubricated, but this is not adequate for anal sex and may not be for vaginal sex either.

Condoms should be used with water-based lubricant such as *KY*, *Liquid Silk*, *Astroglide*, *Maximus* or *Wetstuff*. Never use oil-based lubricants such as body lotions, massage oils, or *Vaseline*, as these weaken the latex and can cause the condom to break. Apply lubricant to the outside of the condom (once you're wearing it) and to the entrance to the rectum or vagina. Don't put lubricant inside the condom as this can cause it to slip off during sex.

Spermicides

Some condoms are coated with a spermicide to assist contraception. However, some spermicides can cause irritation in the rectum or vagina and therefore increase the chance of passing on any infections which might be present. Excessive use of a spermicide called nonoxynol-9 (found on *Durex Extra Safe*, *Mates Natural*, *Mates Conform* and *Mates Ultra* condoms, and in some lubricants) is not recommended for this reason, and is best avoided.

Latex allergies

Most condoms are made of latex (rubber). If you are allergic to latex, you can use *Durex Avanti* instead. *Avanti* is made of plastic rather than latex and can therefore be used with oil-based lubricants. However, there is less information available on the reliability of plastic condoms than latex condoms.

Where to get condoms

Condoms are on sale in chemists, shops and supermarkets, and on the internet. HIV clinics and Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics provide free condoms, as do Family Planning Clinics if you are using condoms for contraception. Find your local service in the *Yellow Pages* or at aidsmap.com. Condoms are also available at many gay venues, but not all, so take them with you to be sure.

Advice on using condoms

If you're having difficulties with condoms, such as breakages, irritation in the genital area, or perhaps you're finding it difficult to negotiate using condoms with your partner, you can speak to a Health Advisor in your local Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinic. Health Advisors are trained to offer advice and support on sexual health.

please photocopy and pass on

copyright © NAM 2006
all rights reserved

**NAM publishes a
wide range of
publications on
treatment for HIV**

**for details write to
NAM
Freepost LON 17995
London SW9 6BR**

tel
+44 (0) 20 7840 0050
web
www.aidsmap.com