

FEMALE CONDOMS

WHAT ARE FEMALE CONDOMS?

- A female condom is a thin sheath of soft transparent polyurethane plastic, about 7 cm to 8 cm in diameter and 17 cm long. It has two flexible rings. One ring has a smaller diameter and found at the closed end of the condom, which aids the woman in inserting it high within the vagina near the cervix; the other is wider and found at the open end covering the vulva when properly positioned.
- A female condom works by forming a barrier that keeps sperms out of the vagina, thus preventing pregnancy; it also keeps infections in semen, on the penis, or in the vagina from infecting the other partner.



HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE FEMALE CONDOM?

The effectiveness of this method depends on the user. The risk of pregnancy or STI is greatest when condoms are not used with every sexual intercourse.

Protection against pregnancy

- When typically used, about 21 per 100 women using female condoms become pregnant over the first year of use.
- When used correctly with every sexual intercourse, about 5 of 100 women using female condoms become pregnant over the first year of use.

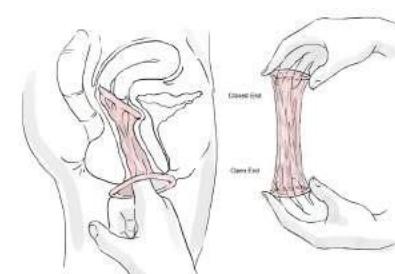
Protection against HIV and other STIs

- Female condoms reduce the risk of STIs, including HIV, when used correctly with every sexual intercourse.

HOW IS THE FEMALE CONDOM USED?

A client can start the method any time she wants. The following steps must be followed by the user when using a condom before sexual intercourse.

1. Check the female condom package for any damage, including the expiry date. Do not use a female condom past its expiration date. If possible, wash your hands with mild soap and clean water before inserting the female condom into the vagina.
 - 2. Insert the condom into the vagina before any physical contact.
 - Insert the condom within 8 hours before sex. To achieve the most protection, insert the condom before the penis comes into contact with the vagina.
 - Assume a position that is comfortable for insertion: squatting, raising one leg, sitting, or lying down.
 - Rub the sides of the female condom together to spread the lubricant evenly.
 - Grasp the ring at the closed end, and squeeze it so it becomes long and narrow.
 - With the other hand, separate the outer lips of the vagina (labia), and locate the vaginal canal.
 - Gently push the inner ring into the vagina as far up as it will go. Insert a finger into the condom to push it in into place. Allow about 2 cm to 3 cm of the condom and the outer ring to cover the outside the vagina.
 - 3. Ensure that the penis enters the condom and stays inside the condom during sexual intercourse.



- The man or woman should carefully guide the tip of the penis inside the condom, not between the condom and the wall of the vagina. If the penis goes outside the condom, withdraw and try again.
 - If the condom is accidentally pulled out of the vagina or pushed into it during sex, put the condom back in place
4. After the man withdraws his penis, hold the outer ring of the condom, twist to seal in fluids, and gently pull it out of the vagina.
- The female condom does not need to be removed immediately after sex.
 - Remove the condom before standing up, to avoid spilling the semen.
 - If the couple has sex again, they should use a new condom.
 - Reuse of female condoms is not recommended.
5. Wrap the used condom in its package, and put it in the rubbish or latrine.

WHO CAN AND CANNOT USE THE FEMALE CONDOM?

- Except for allergy to the condom material, no medical conditions prevent the use of this method.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF THE FEMALE CONDOM?

Known health benefits of female condoms include protection against risk of pregnancy and STIs, including HIV.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF THE FEMALE CONDOM?

- Mild irritation in or around the vagina
 - Apply lubricant on the part of the condom that comes into contact with the vaginal wall.
 - If symptoms persist, assess and refer the client to a specialist for the treatment of possible vaginal infection or STI.

WHAT SHOULD BE INQUIRED FROM OR ADVISED TO THE CLIENT DURING FOLLOW-UP?

- Ask how the client is doing with the method and whether she is satisfied. Ask if she has any questions or anything to discuss.
- Ask if she has any trouble using a female condom correctly every time she has sex. Give her any information or help that she needs.
- Inquire from a long-term client any major life changes that may affect her needs, particularly plans for having children and about the risk of STIs or HIV. Follow up as needed.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CLIENTS STOP USING THE METHOD?

A client who stops using this method faces the risk of getting pregnant and the risk of getting STIs or HIV.

WHEN IS A REFERRAL NEEDED?

A referral is needed when the client develops symptoms of STIs, such as sores on the genitals, pain when urinating, and vaginal discharge that is foul smelling; and when the client develops severe allergic reactions to the condom.

WHAT ARE THE COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT FEMALE CONDOMS?

1. Are female condoms difficult to use?
 - No, but practice and patience are required to learn how to use the method.
2. Are female condoms too big to be comfortable?
 - No. Female condoms have the same length as male condoms, except wider. They are very flexible and fit to the shape of the vagina. Female condoms have been carefully designed and tested to fit any woman or man, regardless of her vaginal size or his penis size, respectively.
3. Can female condoms be lost inside a woman's body?
 - No. Female condoms remain in a woman's vagina until removed. These condoms cannot enter the cervix and uterus because of their large size.

WHAT COUNSELING TIPS SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO A CLIENT WHO CHOOSES TO USE THE FEMALE CONDOM?

- Reuse of the female condom is not recommended. Always use a new female condom every sexual intercourse.
- Help the client to choose another method if she is not comfortable with using a female condom.
- For clients at risk of STIs and HIV, urge the continued use of female condoms despite discomfort.
- Ensure that the client understands the correct use of female condoms. Ask the client to demonstrate while explaining the basic steps in using a female condom.
- Explain why using a condom with every sexual intercourse is important and that one unprotected sexual intercourse can lead to pregnancy, STI, or both. Encourage the client to always use a condom as an FP method or as a protection against STIs, including HIV.
- Discuss the different approaches or skills that can be applied for negotiating condom use with partners.

