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Female condoms

The female condom is a device used for birth control. Like a male condom, it creates a barrier to prevent the sperm from getting to the egg.

Information

The female condom protects against pregnancy. It also protects against infections spread during sexual contact, including HIV. However, it is not thought to work as well as male condoms in protecting against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The female condom is made of a thin, strong plastic called polyurethane. A newer version, which costs less, is made of a substance called nitrile.

These condoms fit inside the vagina. The condom has a ring on each end.

- The ring that is placed inside the vagina fits over the cervix and covers it with the rubber material.
- The other ring is open. It rests outside of the vagina and covers the vulva.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?

The female condom is about 75% to 82% effective with normal use. When used correctly all of the time, female condoms are 95% effective.

Female condoms can fail for the same reasons as male condoms, including:

- There is a tear in a condom. (This can occur before or during intercourse.)
- The condom is not put in place before the penis touches the vagina.
- You do not use a condom each time you have intercourse.
- There are manufacturing defects in the condom (rare).
- The contents of the condom are spilled as it is being removed.

CONVENIENCE

- Condoms are available without a prescription.
- They are fairly inexpensive (though more expensive than male condoms).

- You can buy female condoms at most drugstores, STI clinics, and family planning clinics.
- You need to plan to have a condom on hand when you have sex. However, female condoms may be placed up to 8 hours before intercourse.

PROS

- Can be used during menstruation or pregnancy, or after recent childbirth.
- Allows a woman to protect herself from pregnancy and STIs without relying on the male condom.
- Protects against pregnancy and STIs.

CONS

- Friction of the condom may reduce clitoral stimulation and lubrication. This may make intercourse less enjoyable or even uncomfortable, although using lubricant may help.
- Irritation and allergic reactions may occur.
- The condom may make noise (using the lubricant may help). The newer version is much quieter.
- There is no direct contact between the penis and the vagina.
- The woman is not aware of warm fluid entering her body. (This may be important to some women, but not to others.)

HOW TO USE A FEMALE CONDOM

- Find the inner ring of the condom, and hold it between your thumb and middle finger.
- Squeeze the ring together and insert it as far as possible into the vagina. Make sure that the inner ring is past the pubic bone.
- Leave the outer ring outside of the vagina.
- Make sure that the condom has not become twisted.
- Put a couple of drops of water-based lubricant on the penis before and during intercourse as needed.
- After intercourse, and before standing up, squeeze and twist the outer ring to make sure the semen stays inside.
- Remove the condom by pulling gently. Use it only once.

DISPOSING OF FEMALE CONDOMS

You should always throw condoms in the trash. Do not flush a female condom down the toilet. It is likely to clog the plumbing.

IMPORTANT TIPS

- Be careful not to tear condoms with sharp fingernails or jewelry.
- DO NOT use a female condom and a male condom at the same time. Friction between them can cause them to bunch up or tear.
- DO NOT use a petroleum-based substance such as Vaseline as a lubricant. These substances break down latex.

- If a condom tears or breaks, the outer ring is pushed up inside the vagina, or the condom bunches up inside the vagina during intercourse, remove it and insert another condom right away.
- Make sure condoms are available and convenient. This will help avoid the temptation of not using a condom during sex.
- Remove tampons before inserting the condom.
- Contact your health care provider or pharmacy for information about emergency contraception (Plan B) if the condom tears or the contents spill when removing it.
- If you use condoms regularly as your contraceptive, ask your provider or pharmacist about having Plan B on hand to use in case of a condom accident.
- Use each condom only once.

Alternative Names

Condoms for women; Contraception - female condom; Family planning - female condom; Birth control - female condom

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