

# male & female condoms



## THE CONDOM

This leaflet gives information about the two types of condom: the male condom and the female condom. Both are barrier methods of contraception.

A **male condom** is a narrow tube, made from very thin, natural latex rubber which is soft and stretchy. It is closed at one end, and fits over a man's erect penis. Most male condoms have a 'teat' at the closed end, to hold the man's semen once he has ejaculated (or come).

A **female condom** is a tube made of very thin polyurethane plastic or rubber. The only female condom currently available is 'Femidom', which is made of polyurethane. It is closed at one end, and designed to form a loose lining to a woman's vagina with two flexible rings, one at each end, to keep it in place.

## HOW DO CONDOMS WORK?

They work by preventing the man's sperm from meeting and fertilising the woman's egg.

## HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?

**Male Condom:** Tests show that for every 100 couples who use the male condom very carefully and consistently, two women will get pregnant in a year. But with less careful and consistent use, up to 15 could get pregnant. It is important to use a quality condom – carefully – every time you have sex, whatever your contraceptive method. Look for the CE Mark or Kitemark which indicates that the condoms have met with European Standards for condoms.

**Female Condom:** There have been no large-scale studies showing how effective the female condom is. But research to date suggests that it should be as effective as the male condom. Currently there is no quality standard for the female condom.

*Male and female condoms should always be used carefully, to make sure that no sperm comes into contact with the woman's genital area.*

## WHERE DO YOU GET CONDOMS?

You can buy male and female condoms from family planning clinics, sexual health clinics and some GUM clinics. 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 not as widely available.

## WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- » Male condoms are easily accessible.
- » Helps prevent the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS.
- » There are few if any side-effects.
- » Its contraceptive effects are totally reversible.
- » You only need to use them when having sex.
- » A female condom can be put in any time before sex.
- » Male condoms come in a variety of types, shapes and sizes to suit everyone.

## WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?

- » Putting them on can interrupt sex.
- » They are expensive.
- » A male condom can sometimes slip off or split.
- » 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.
- » Male condoms are not generally suitable for men who do not always keep their erection during intercourse.
- » Female condom may be noisy and may slip into the vagina during sex.

## WHO IS IT SUITABLE FOR?

Male and female condoms are suitable for most couples. Many couples choose condoms because they offer effective contraception and the best protection against sexually transmitted infections, when used carefully and consistently. For this reason, many couples choose to use a condom in addition to some other form of contraception, such as the pill. Research to date suggests that the female condom should provide similar protection.

Many choose condoms because, unlike most other kinds of contraception, you do not need medical advice before starting to use them.

Female condoms are not suitable for women who have an infection in their vagina or cervix, or for those who do not feel comfortable touching their genital area.

# MALE & FEMALE CONDOMS CONTD.

## HOW DO YOU USE A CONDOM?

Both kinds of condoms are easy to use. But if you are using them for the first time, it is a good idea to practise first, either on your own or with your partner.

Instructions are also given on the pack or in a leaflet inside the pack. The man can put the condom on himself, or his partner can do it. Similarly the woman can insert the female condom or her partner can help.

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.

### Male 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 when the penis is fully erect and **before** it touches the vagina or genital area.
- » Still holding the end, roll the condom all the way down the penis. If it won't go to the base then it's probably on inside out. If so, start again with a new condom as sperm could now be on the first one.
- » As soon as the man has ejaculated, and before the penis goes soft, hold the condom firmly in place while pulling out. Do this slowly and carefully so you do not spill any semen.

### Female condom:

- » You can put the condom in any time before sex but always **before** the penis touches the vagina or genital area. You can put the condom in when you are lying down, squatting or with one leg on a chair. Find the position that suits you best.
- » Hold the closed end of the condom and squeeze the inner ring between your thumb and middle finger. Keeping your index finger on the inner ring helps you to insert the condom into the vagina.
- » With your other hand, separate the folds of skin (labia) around your vagina.
- » Then put the squeezed ring into the vagina and push it up as far as you can.
- » Now put your index or middle finger, or both, inside the open end of the condom, until you can feel the inner ring.
- » Then push the inner ring as far back into the vagina as it will go. It will then be lying just above your pubic bone. (You can feel your pubic bone by inserting your index or middle finger into your vagina and curving it forward slightly).
- » Make sure that the outer ring lies close against the area outside your vagina (vulva).
- » It is a good idea for the woman or man to guide the man's penis into the condom to make sure it does not enter the vagina outside the condom. Holding the outer ring in place, outside the vagina, also helps to stop the entire condom being accidentally pushed right into the vagina. As the female condom is loose-fitting, it will move during sex. But you will still be protected as long as the penis stays inside the condom.
- » To remove the condom, simply twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside. Then pull the condom out gently.

## AFTER REMOVAL

Make sure the man's penis does not touch the genital area again, and if you have sex again, use a new condom.

Dispose of your condoms carefully. Never flush them down the toilet as they cannot be broken down in the sewage system. Wrap them in a tissue and put them in a bin.

## WHAT IF THE CONDOM COMES OFF/ SPLITS

Emergency contraception which may prevent pregnancy is available from your GP or family planning clinic. However emergency contraception must be taken as soon as possible after unprotected sex and definitely within 72 hours. So call to schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

**Remember** if you have had unprotected sex it is possible that you have contracted a Sexually Transmitted Infection. Some STIs are painful, some lead to infertility and some like HIV have no cure. Emergency contraception does not offer protection against sexually transmitted infections so you may need to consider having a test to screen for STIs.

## ABOUT SPERMICIDES AND LUBRICANTS

Both male and female condoms are lubricated to make them easier to use. 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 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.

Some people also like to use additional lubrication. If you are using a male condom, remember that you should never use oil-based products – such as body oils, creams, lotions or petroleum jelly – as a lubricant as these 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 pessaries or suppositories – ask your doctor or pharmacist if it will affect the male condom.

Any lubricant can be used with male or female polyurethane condoms.

## HOW TO STORE CONDOMS?

Always keep packets of condoms and individual condoms where they cannot be damaged by strong heat, sharp objects, light or damp.

TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT AT AN IFPA MEDICAL CENTRE OR FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR SERVICES PLEASE CALL:

IFPA, 5-7 Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1  
T: +353 (1) 872 7088

IFPA, The Square, Tallaght, Dublin  
T: +353 (1) 459 7685

THE IFPA ALSO OPERATES A NATIONAL INFORMATION SERVICE PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND DETAILS OF STI AND CONTRACEPTIVE SERVICES IN YOUR AREA.

T: +353 (1) 8069444  
E: [post@ifpa.ie](mailto:post@ifpa.ie)

**DON'T FORGET** – THIS LEAFLET CAN ONLY OUTLINE BASIC INFORMATION ON CONDOMS. INFORMATION IS BASED ON EVIDENCE AND MEDICAL OPINION AT THE TIME OF PUBLICATION HOWEVER YOU MAY COME ACROSS CONFLICTING ADVICE ON CERTAIN POINTS. RING OR VISIT YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU ARE WORRIED OR UNSURE ABOUT ANYTHING.

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