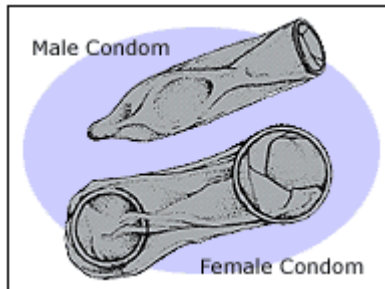


## Guide to Contraception: Male and Female Condoms

This information was sourced from <http://www.ifpa.ie/contraception>



This page gives you some information about the two

types of condom: the male condom and the female condom. Both are barrier methods of contraception. They work by preventing the man's sperm from meeting and fertilising the woman's egg.

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). Male condoms come in a variety of types - for example plain, coloured, ribbed, shaped, flavoured and lubricated.

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. The loose ring in the closed end fits inside the vagina, just behind the pubic bone. The fixed ring at the open end stays outside, lying flat against the area around the entrance to the woman's vagina - the vulva. Other types of female condom are expected on the market in the future.

### **Are condoms effective contraceptives?**

**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 BSI Kitemark until the introduction of a new

European Standard for condoms. Condoms meeting this new standard will display the CE Mark or the Kitemark.

**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 British 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.*

### **Can condoms help protect your sexual health?**

Anyone, male or female, can get a sexually transmitted infection (STI), including HIV, from vaginal or anal intercourse.

Using condoms - carefully - every time - helps protect against STIs and HIV infection, whatever your family planning method.

And do you know that regular checks of breasts, cervix (smear test), and testes can save life?

### **Who are they 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. Male condoms have been shown to protect against herpes, genital warts, chlamydia and HIV - the virus that causes AIDS. 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 couples choose condoms because, unlike most other kinds of contraception, you do not need medical advice before starting to use them.

Male condoms are not generally suitable for men who do not always keep their erection during intercourse.

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.

### **The male condom or female condom?**

It's up to you and your partner to choose the condom which suits you best. Why not try both before making up your mind? You may decide to use a male condom on some occasions and a female condom on others.

Some couples choose male condoms to help the man share the responsibility of family planning and safer sex. (Male condoms are the only form of contraception for men, apart from vasectomy - which is male sterilisation).

Some women, who want to take direct responsibility for family planning and safer sex, may prefer the female condom.

Some couples prefer the female condom because you can insert it any time before intercourse, and remove it any time later, after the man has ejaculated and withdrawn.

### **Are there any problems?**

There are no known side effects from using either the male or female condom, but a few men and women are sensitive to the latex or spermicides used in male condoms. Special male condoms are available if this is a problem.

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.

### **About spermicides and lubricants**

Both male and female condoms are lubricated to make them easier to use. Some male condoms are lubricated with a spermicide - a chemical that kills sperm, so there is really no advantage in using extra spermicide. The female condom currently available contains a spermicide-free lubricant, because spermicide is not needed.

Some people choose to use extra spermicide because it offers some additional protection against sexually transmitted infections. Others use a spermicide as an additional lubricant, though many find a water-based lubricant, such as KY Jelly, suitable for use during sex. If a spermicide causes discomfort or irritation, stop using the product and seek medical advice.

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. You should be able to use any of these products with female condoms made of polyurethane, as research to date suggests they are not affected by oil-based products.

### **How do you use a male condom?**

If you get your male condoms from your family doctor or a family planning clinic, you may be told how to use them or you can ask. 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.

### **How do you use a female condom?**

If you get your female condoms from a family planning clinic, the nurse or doctor will explain how to use them or you can ask. The pack also contains an [instruction](#) leaflet. The female condom can be put in by the woman or her partner.

### **Where should you keep the condoms?**

Always keep your condoms where they cannot be damaged by heat, light or damp. Do not keep condoms in your body (eg. in a wallet) as your body heat may weaken them.

### **How do you dispose of them?**

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.

### **Can anything go wrong?**

Occasionally sperm can get into the vagina during intercourse, even if you are using a condom. This may happen:

- if the male or female condom splits
- if the male condom slips off
- if the female condom gets pushed too far into the vagina
- if the man's penis enters the vagina outside the female condom by mistake.

If an accident does happen, or if you did not use a condom for any reason, you should get immediate advice about emergency contraception. It is advisable not to use a condom for longer than 20 minutes to avoid accidental breakage. Never re-use a condom.

**At the IFPA ...**

The IFPA supplies a range of male and female condoms, as well as spermicides and lubricants. Many of these products are also available at most pharmacies and other shops.

**Don't forget**

This page can only outline basic information based on evidence available and current medical opinion at the time of publication. Ring or visit your doctor if you are worried or unsure about anything.