

**A guide to male and female condoms / Family Planning Association,  
Pharmacy Healthcare.**

**Contributors**

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Pharmacy Healthcare Scheme

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
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 pharmacy  
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A guide to  
**MALE  
AND FEMALE  
CONDOMS**



## WHY CHOOSE CONDOMS?

Condoms are a well-known method of contraception. But they can do more than protect against unplanned pregnancy. Using a condom every time you have sex also helps protect you and your partner from sexually transmitted diseases – including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

This guide to male and female condoms gives you more information on how they can protect against pregnancy and help you look after your sexual health.

The FPA has a free leaflet on safer sex and the condom, and leaflets on all the family planning methods. Just ask us for any of the following:

- ☐ Your guide to safer sex and the condom
- ☐ The combined pill
- ☐ All about family planning services
- ☐ Contraception – your choices
- ☐ The progestogen-only pill
- ☐ Diaphragms, caps and the sponge
- ☐ Injectable methods
- ☐ Natural methods of family planning
- ☐ Male and female sterilisation
- ☐ Emergency contraception

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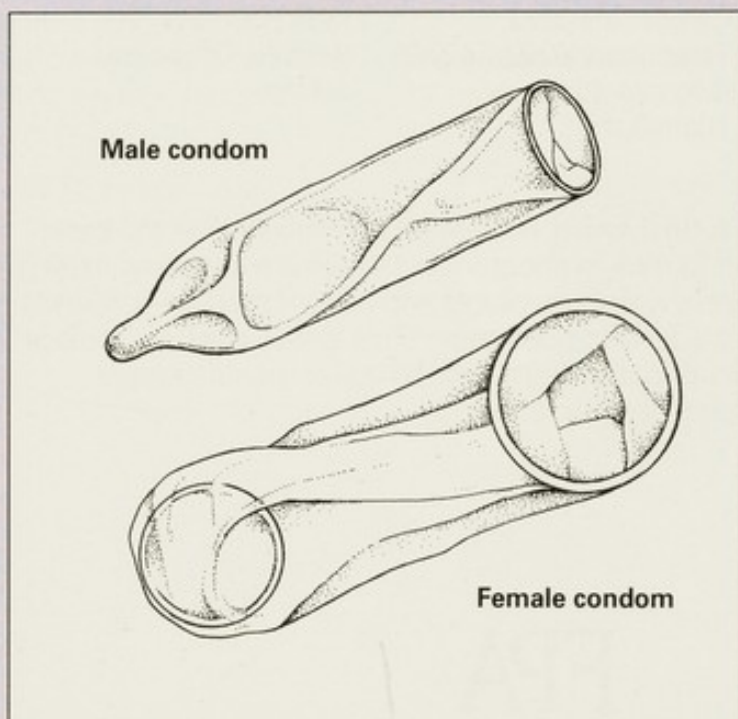
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## MALE AND FEMALE CONDOMS

This leaflet 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 in the UK 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 condom that has passed the strict tests of the British Standards Institution (BSI), so choose one with the BSI Kitemark symbol on the pack.



**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.

Because the female condom is a new product, no British standard currently exists. The BSI is investigating the possibility of preparing a standard for female condoms.

**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 disease (STD), including HIV, from intercourse.
- Using condoms - carefully - every time - helps protect against STDs and HIV infection, whatever your family planning method.
- For more information on safer sex, read the leaflet *Your guide to safer sex and the condom*, available from the FPA.

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 diseases, 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 diseases. 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.

- Use a new condom each time you have sex. Always check the expiry date on the packet and that there is a BSI Kitemark.

- Always put the male condom on as soon as the penis is erect but before there is any contact with the woman's genital area. This is important because fluid, which may contain sperm, can seep from the penis early during sex.

- Take your condom out of the packet carefully, making sure that you don't damage it with your fingernails or jewellery.

- Gently squeeze the last centimetre of the closed end between your finger and thumb, to expel any trapped air and make space for the man's semen.



- Keeping the end of the condom 'air free', hold the condom at the tip of the erect penis.

- With the flat part of your fingers, roll the condom carefully over the penis. It is now safe for the penis to enter the woman's vagina or touch her genital area.



- After the man has ejaculated but before his erection is completely lost, hold the condom rim firmly around the penis while the penis is withdrawn. This makes sure that the condom doesn't slip, accidentally spilling semen in or around the woman's vagina.





## 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.

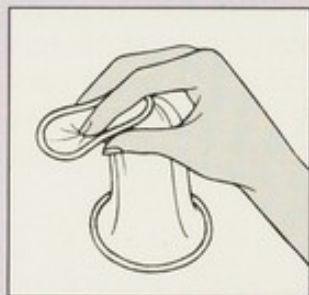
- Use a new condom each time you have sexual intercourse. Always check the expiry date on the pack.

- You can put your condom in any time before having sex. You must put it in before the man's penis touches your genital area. This is important because fluid, which may contain sperm, can seep from the penis early during sex. You can put the condom in when you are lying down, squatting, or with one leg on a chair. Experiment to find the position that suits you best.



- Take your condom out of the packet carefully, making sure that you don't damage it with your fingernails or jewellery.

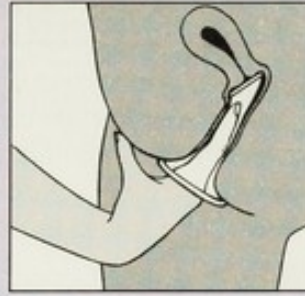
- Hold the condom at the closed end, and squeeze the inner ring between your thumb and middle finger. Keeping your index finger on the inner ring helps to keep the condom steady.



- With your other hand, separate the folds of skin (labia) around your vagina. Then insert the squeezed ring into the vagina and push it up as far as you can.



■ Now put your index or middle finger inside the open end of the condom, until you can feel the inner ring. Then push the inner ring further into the vagina, so that it is 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 vulva.

■ During intercourse, it is a good idea for the woman to guide the man's penis into the condom to make sure it does not enter the vagina outside the condom. As the female condom is loose-fitting, it will move during sex, but you will still be protected because the penis stays inside the condom.

■ To remove the condom, simply twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside, and pull the condom out gently.



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

Always keep your condoms where they cannot be damaged by heat, light or damp.

### **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 (see below).

### **Emergency contraception**

Contact your doctor or family planning clinic as soon as possible if you think you may be at risk of unplanned pregnancy.

There are two methods of emergency contraception:

- two special doses of the pill, or
- fitting an IUD in the womb.

The pill must be taken within three days (72 hours) after sex and the IUD must be inserted within five days after sex. In both cases, the sooner the better. Both methods of emergency contraception need a doctor's prescription.

If a condom splits or comes off and you are worried about sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV - the virus that causes AIDS, you can get advice from:

- your family doctor
- a family planning clinic
- a genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic (the number is in the phone book under GUM, STD or special clinic or the old name of VD clinic)
- the free, 24-hour National AIDS Helpline on 0800 567 123
- the Family Planning Association (see page 12 for details).

## **WHERE TO GO FOR FAMILY PLANNING**

Family planning services and supplies are free to everyone – men and women, of all ages – on the National Health Service. You have three choices of where to go for family planning:

### **A family planning clinic**

There are NHS family planning clinics all over the country, where you can get free condoms. There are also a few fee-paying clinics. You can get details of your nearest clinic from your phone book, health centre, midwife or health visitor, hospital, local authority or local community health council (CHC). Or you can ring the Family Planning Association (FPA). Our address and telephone number are given on page 12.

### **A family doctor**

You can go to your own GP or another GP who gives family planning advice to other GPs' patients too. Lists of GPs are kept in libraries, post offices, Family Health Services Authorities and advice centres. Those giving contraceptive advice have a letter C after their names. Only some GPs can supply condoms, but it is worth asking.

### **A youth advisory centre**

Many family planning clinics have sessions especially for young people under 25. You can phone the Brook Advisory Centre on 071-708 1234 for details.

When you go for family planning, the doctor or nurse will talk to you about contraception and advise on which method is best for you. You may need to have an examination. Don't be embarrassed: feel free to ask the doctor or nurse any questions about family planning, your sexual relationship or safer sex. You will be asked to come back soon to make sure you are happy with your choice. Partners are welcome, and all advice and supplies are free.

You can also buy male and female condoms from a pharmacy or through mail order as well as from slot machines, supermarkets, garages, barbers and other shops.



## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

If you want to find out more about condoms or any other method of contraception, or want to know where your nearest clinic is, just contact the FPA by phone or letter (address below). Please send a stamped addressed envelope.

### **FPA National Office**

27-35 Mortimer Street  
London W1N 7RJ  
Telephone: 071-636 7866  
(Monday to Friday,  
10am-3pm)

### **FPA Northern Ireland**

113 University Street  
Belfast BT7 1HP  
Telephone: 0232-325488  
(Monday to Friday,  
10am-3pm)

### **FPA Wales**

4 Museum Place  
Cardiff CF1 3BG  
Telephone: 0222-342766  
(Monday to Friday,  
10am-3pm)

### **FPA Scotland**

New centre opening in  
1992. Contact FPA  
National Office for  
details.

**A final word** This leaflet can only outline the basic information about male and female condoms, based on evidence available and current medical opinion at the time of publication. This leaflet does not replace information from your doctor or manufacturers' packet information.

# FPA

## FAMILY PLANNING

A S S O C I A T I O N

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Family Planning Association  
27-35 Mortimer Street  
London W1N 7RJ  
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