

Barrier Devices

Being in a mutually monogamous relationship or choosing to not have sex are the most effective ways to reduce your risk for getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). The next most effective prevention method is to use a barrier device when engaging in sexual activity.

What are condoms designed for a penis?

These are latex devices that are designed to fit snugly over an erect penis. When used correctly, condoms prevent direct contact between the penis and the tissue around it, thus reducing the risk for STI transmission. Condoms are individually packaged and are for one-time use only. Condoms designed for a penis are available for free in the lobby of University Health Center, at the Student Rec Center, and at the Duck Nest in the EMU. You do not need an appointment to stop by and pick them up.

What if I have a latex allergy?

Try non-latex condoms. They are available at the health center for free for anyone who asks.

What if it feels too tight?

Condoms are *designed* to be tight so they don't slip off. It is pretty rare for a condom to not fit over a penis. Having said that, there are rare cases where a larger condom (XL) is more appropriate, and we have those available at the health center for free as well.

Why do I need lube?

There are many reasons why a person with a vagina may not create enough personal lubrication before or during sexual activity. Store-bought lubricants (a.k.a. lube) can minimize micro-tears that can occur which can then create a pathway for STI transmission.

What kind of lube can I use with a condom?

Latex condoms (the most common kind) can be used with water-based or silicone-based lube. Don't use oil-based lube or kitchen oils, baby oils, etc., with latex condoms because they can degrade the condom and increase the risk for breakage. Non-latex (polyurethane) condoms can be used with water-based, silicone-based, or oil-based lubes. We have lubrication packets available for free at the University Health Center.

What about lambskin condoms?

Lambskin condoms are designed for a penis and are made out of lamb intestine. They are not recommended for STI risk reduction because the tiny pores in lambskin condoms allow STIs to pass through.

Oral sex with a condom?

Because one of the routes of STI transmission is oral sex with a penis, it is recommended to use a condom on a penis during oral sex. Flavored condoms are a choice and we usually carry some at the health center. Our selection varies, but we commonly carry fruit-flavored condoms.

How do I know my condom isn't defective?

Condoms are considered medical devices and are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Each latex condom made in the United States is tested to make sure it has no holes or defects prior to being packaged. The package is then stamped with an expiration date. Condoms are designed to stay viable for five years from manufacture, but ONLY if stored at room temperature.

How often do penis condoms break or slip off?

This occurs very rarely. During penis/vagina sex, rates of condom breakage average 2 in every 100 uses, or 2 percent. The percentage is thought to be a bit higher with penis/anus sex. But most of the time "condom failure" is actually "user failure" — due to user error, as opposed to a defect in the condom.

What are vaginal condoms?

These are condoms designed specifically to fit around the vulva and within the vagina. There are new (and improved) designs coming out soon, but right now the most readily available vaginal condom is called the FC2. We recommend you practice with it prior to using them for sex so you feel confident using it. We encourage you to talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner if you'd like help learning how to use one. Vaginal condoms are available for free at the University Health Center and the Duck Nest. Vaginal condoms are harder to find at stores, but Walgreens and Walmart stock them.

What kind of lube can I use with a vaginal condom?

Vaginal condoms (like the FC2) are made of nitrile and can be used with all types of lube: water-based, silicone-based, and oil-based. If you happen to get a newer latex vaginal condom, remember to avoid oil-based lubes, which can degrade the latex and cause breakage. We have free lubrication packets at the University Health Center and at the Duck Nest.

Can you put a vaginal condom in even before sex?

One benefit of vaginal condoms is that they can be put in place prior to sex.

Are there any rectal condoms?

There aren't any condoms designed specifically to go within the rectum for anal sex. However, vaginal condoms have been used inside the rectum for STI risk reduction. There haven't been good studies testing this use and the condoms are not FDA approved for anal sex, so we still recommend finger condoms, gloves, or penis condoms as the most effective ways to reduce STI transmission.

What are dental dams?

These are prepackaged rectangular latex barriers designed to be placed over a vagina or an anus (or anywhere else) for oral sex. They are available for free at the University Health Center and at the Duck Nest. A penis condom can also be used as a dental dam by unrolling it, cutting the tip off, and then cutting lengthwise to create a rectangular barrier.

Finger and hand condoms?

Hand condoms are (obviously) called gloves, and are available very cheaply at any pharmacy in the first aid section.

Finger condoms (also called finger cots) are little one-finger barrier devices. They are usually stocked in the first-aid part of a pharmacy (next to the bandages, etc.). Our opinion is that a full glove is easier to use than a finger cot and more protective. Finger cots are available for free at the University Health Center.

Aren't two condoms better than one? How about a penis condom and a vaginal condom? A glove and a condom? How about two penis condoms?

Barrier devices are designed to be most effective when used alone. Using two devices at once increases the risk for slippage and breakage. Only use one barrier device at a time.

I don't know how to talk to my partner about using barrier protection. It feels embarrassing.

It can be embarrassing. These can be awkward conversations to have. But it's the most effective way to reduce your risk for STIs. You can get ideas on how to have this conversation on our UO SexPositive app. Or ask the nurses at the STI Screening Clinic or a health center clinician for help if you and your partner do not agree about the use of barrier protection.