

The Correct Use of Condoms

A Message to Teens



As a teen, you are faced with many challenges and decisions that will affect the rest of your life. Deciding when to begin having sex is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. It is perfectly normal not to have sex until marriage.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unplanned pregnancies are at all-time highs for people your age. Not having sex (abstinence) is the only sure way to prevent pregnancy and STDs. It's also the only way to avoid getting sexually transmitted HIV, the AIDS virus. However, if you do decide to have sex, correct use of latex condoms will help you protect yourself and your partner against these risks. The American Academy of Pediatrics has designed this brochure to help you understand the importance of always using latex condoms and how to use them correctly.

Why use condoms?

A condom acts like a barrier or wall to keep semen, fluid from the vagina, and blood from passing from one person to the other during sex. These fluids can carry germs. If no condom is used, the germs can pass from the infected person to the uninfected person. Use of a condom also prevents unwanted pregnancies by keeping sperm out of the vagina.

Other good reasons to use condoms:

- They are cheap.
- They are easy to get (you don't need a prescription to buy them).
- They rarely have side effects.
- They are easy to use.

Some people have excuses for not using condoms, such as they are not comfortable, they lessen their enjoyment of sex, or they are unnatural. However, using a condom can make sex more enjoyable because both partners are more relaxed and secure. Besides, the risks involved with **not** using condoms make any excuses seem pretty weak.

How to buy condoms

When buying condoms, be sure the ones you choose:

- are latex—some condoms are made of natural membranes (lambskin) and not latex. Only *latex* condoms have been proved to work against STDs because they prevent the passage of harmful germs.
- have a reservoir (nipple) at the tip to catch semen.
- are lubricated with *nonoxynol-9*, which is a spermicide (chemical) that has been proved to give additional protection against STDs, including the AIDS virus.

Condoms come in different colors, textures, and sometimes sizes. A good-quality condom is the most important feature for safer sex. Other points to keep in mind when buying condoms:

- Be sure to check the expiration date on the package. Do not buy or use them if they have expired.

- Condoms should be stored in a cool, dry place. You can carry a condom with you at all times, but do not store them where they will get hot (like in the glove box of a car). Heat can damage the condom. Also, carrying them in a purse or wallet is okay as long as it is not for long periods of time—this shortens their life.

Try not to feel embarrassed about buying condoms. By using condoms, you are proving that you are being responsible and there is nothing embarrassing about that.

How to put condoms on

Condoms are easy to use. However, they only work if they are used correctly. Follow these easy steps to make sure you are using them the right way (see illustration):

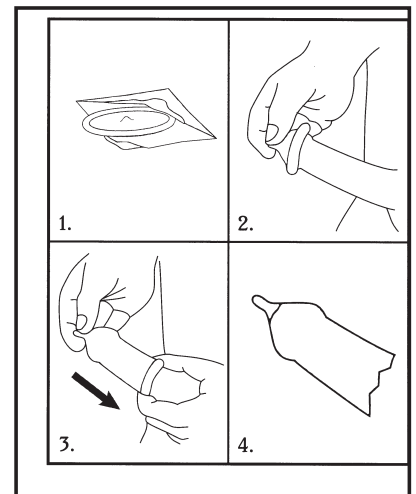
1. Carefully remove the condom from the package.
2. Put the condom on the end of the penis when the penis is *erect* ("hard").
3. Hold the condom by the tip and carefully roll the condom all the way to the base of the penis.
4. Leave extra space (1/4 to 1/2 inch) at tip of the condom to catch the semen.

If you do not have much experience with condoms, you should practice putting a condom on and taking it off **by yourself**, before you use it for sex with another person.

Be sure to put the condom on when an erection first occurs. Do not wait until you are ready to have sex—it may be too late. Drops of semen may leak from the uncovered penis. These small drops are enough to pass STDs to the other person or to cause a woman to get pregnant.

For added protection against STDs and pregnancy, use a spermicidal foam, cream, or jelly **along with** the condom. Make sure the spermicide you use contains nonoxynol-9.

- Before unrolling the condom, place a small amount of the spermicidal foam, cream, or jelly inside its tip.
- After unrolling the condom over the erect penis, place some more of the foam, cream, or jelly on the outside of the condom. Females can also use the spermicide inside the vagina for extra protection in case the condom breaks. Follow the directions on the spermicide package.



How to take condoms off

Withdraw the penis from the vagina right after ejaculation, while it is still erect or “hard.” Hold on to the condom at the rim while the penis is withdrawn. Be careful as you slide it off the penis. Do not tug to pull condom off—it may tear. Throw away used condoms immediately. Never use a condom more than once. Be sure to keep used condoms away from your partner’s genitals and other areas of the body as well. This will prevent semen from getting on hands or other body parts. If this happens, wash any areas of the body that have been touched by the semen.

Always insist that a condom be used *every* time you have sex. It is the only way to be sure that you are protected from infection. You should say **NO** to sex if you don’t have a condom or if your partner refuses to use one.

Special points to remember

- Whenever possible, buy lubricated condoms.
- If you buy condoms that are not lubricated, you also may need a lubricant to help prevent the condom from breaking. Lubricants may also prevent irritation, which could increase the chances of infection. Use only **water-based** lubricants (like K-Y jelly). Do not use oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly (like Vaseline), hand or body lotions, or vegetable oil with latex condoms, since they can damage the condom.
- Other forms of birth control like the pill, diaphragm, or IUD **do not** prevent the spread of STDs—only condoms do. If another form of birth control is being used, a latex condom must also be used to make sure both partners are protected from STDs.

Why should I use a condom?

To prevent the spread of AIDS and other diseases
To prevent pregnancy

When should I use a condom?

Every time you have sex

How do I use a condom?

- Roll the condom all the way to the base of the erect penis.
- Leave space at the tip.
- After intercourse, carefully withdraw the penis and then slide the—condom off.
- Throw away the used condom - condoms can only be used once.

- If you have had sex and you did not use a latex condom, you could have an infection and not know it. Some STDs take several months to show symptoms and some have no symptoms. See your pediatrician if you or your partner have any of the following:

- discharge from the vagina, penis, or rectum
- pain or burning during urination or sex
- pain in the abdomen, testes, buttocks, and legs
- blisters, open sores, warts, rash, or swelling in the genital area or mouth
- flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, aching muscles, or swollen glands
- miss a period and think you might be pregnant

Condoms do not make sex 100% safe, but if used properly, they will reduce the risk of STDs, including AIDS. Know the facts so that you can protect yourself and others from getting infected. Not having sex is the safest. However, if you are having sex, be sure to always use a latex condom. It is the best way for you and your partner to stay healthy. For more information about condoms and how to prevent STDs and pregnancy, talk with your pediatrician.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 57,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
PO Box 747
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

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