

**What are condoms?**

Condoms are a barrier method of birth control that prevent pregnancy by keeping sperm away from the vagina. They reduce the chance of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) by lessening contact between partners' body fluids and skin. There are two types of condoms available:

1. An external condom, sometimes called a "male" condom, is a covering designed to fit over an erect penis or sex toy, and can be used for oral, vaginal, or anal sex. They are usually made of latex but are also available in non-latex materials.
2. An internal condom, sometimes called a "female" condom, is a pouch made of nitrile (a soft and flexible type of plastic that is latex-free). The closed end is inserted into the vagina or the rectum for vaginal or anal sex and the open end has a flexible plastic ring that sits outside at the vaginal or anal opening.

**How can I get condoms?**

You can purchase condoms at pharmacies, grocery, convenience, or adult stores or buy them online. External condoms are often available for free at sexual health clinics, such as at our Options for Sexual Health clinics, or at youth clinics. Options clinics also carry internal condoms for free, but they are less likely to be free in other places.

Advantages of Condoms	Disadvantages of Condoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely available</li> <li>• No prescription needed</li> <li>• No hormones</li> <li>• Minimal to no side effects</li> <li>• Often low cost or free</li> <li>• Protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as pregnancy</li> <li>• A contraceptive method that people with penises can use</li> <li>• Can delay ejaculation and prolong intercourse if that is desired</li> <li>• Can be carried easily and discreetly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not as effective at preventing pregnancy as many other birth control methods</li> <li>• Latex condoms may cause irritation if a person is allergic or sensitive to latex</li> <li>• May slip off or break, particularly if improperly stored or used incorrectly</li> <li>• To be effective, they need to be used every time you have sex and before genital to genital contact, so may reduce spontaneity or interrupt sexual activity</li> <li>• May reduce sensitivity during intercourse or cause erection problems for some people</li> <li>• Relies on high commitment of both partners as well as cooperation and communication</li> <li>• The receptive partner may not always be able to tell if one was used or used correctly</li> </ul>

**What do I need to know before I use condoms?**

- Store condoms somewhere cool and dry as heat and sunlight can damage them.
- Always check the expiry date before using a condom.
- Have more than one condom in case one is damaged, expired, or put on the wrong way.
- Do not use condoms that have damaged packages, are sticky, brittle, discoloured, or have no air in the package (which could mean there is a hole).
- Open the package and remove the condom gently (be careful of teeth or long nails).
- Adding extra lubricant (lube) can help condoms feel better and make them less likely to break or slip off. With latex condoms only use water or silicone based lubes. Oil-based products break down latex.
- Use a new condom for each act of vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Never reuse a condom.

FAQs	External Condoms	Internal Condoms
<b>How effective are they at preventing pregnancy?</b>	About 87% effective, which means that about 13 people out of 100 using them as their only form of birth control get pregnant in a year.	About 79% effective, which means that about 21 people out of 100 using them as their only form of birth control get pregnant in a year.
<b>How effective are they at protecting against STIs being passed?</b>	Very effective, particularly for STIs passed through bodily fluids (such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV).	Very effective for STIs passed through bodily fluids as well as providing greater protection against STIs passed through skin-to-skin contact (such as HPV and herpes) as they cover a wider area of skin.
<b>Why might I choose one over the other?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to get and often free</li> <li>• More effective at preventing pregnancy</li> <li>• Some external condoms are flavoured for use with oral sex</li> <li>• Available in a variety of shapes, textures, and thicknesses, and can be latex or non-latex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All internal condoms are non-latex</li> <li>• Receptive partners can have more control over condom use</li> <li>• Less likely to break</li> <li>• More effective at preventing STIs</li> <li>• Can be inserted ahead of time so they do not interrupt sexual activity</li> <li>• Less likely to affect an erection</li> </ul>
<b>How do I use it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place the condom on the tip of the penis or toy with the rim rolling outwards. If you put the condom on the wrong way, it will not roll down. If this happens use a new one as there might already be pre-ejaculate (pre-cum) on it.</li> <li>• Pinch the tip to remove air and make room for the ejaculate (semen). Roll the condom down to the base of the penis or toy.</li> <li>• To keep fluid from leaking, hold the base of the condom and withdraw the penis after ejaculation while still erect (hard). Move away from the other person's body and remove it.</li> <li>• Check for breaks or tears and throw it out in a covered garbage container (never in the toilet!).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insert the condom up to 6 hours before intercourse.</li> <li>• For anal sex, take out the inner ring.</li> <li>• For vaginal sex, squeeze the inner ring and insert the closed end of the condom.</li> <li>• The outer ring sits over the outer lips of the vulva or outside the anus.</li> <li>• Hold the outer ring when putting the penis or toy inside the condom so that it does not slip in along the side.</li> <li>• Take it out right after sex by squeezing and twisting the outer ring to keep fluids inside and pull the condom out.</li> <li>• Throw it out in a covered garbage container (never in the toilet!).</li> </ul>

## What if the condom breaks or falls off?

Consider STI testing and emergency contraception if needed. Learn more at [www.optionsforsexualhealth.org](http://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org)

### Questions? We're here for you!

We know it can be confusing to choose and use a method. We are here to help.

You can visit one of our Options for Sexual Health Clinics to speak with a health care provider. Our Sex Sense Team is available Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. by phone 1-800-739-7367 or by email at [SexSense.org](mailto:SexSense.org) to answer your questions about birth control, or any other questions about sex, sexuality, or sexual health. This fact sheet contains general information and should not be used in place of individual consultation with a qualified healthcare provider.