

## WHAT TYPES ARE THERE?

Condoms are available in different sizes, textures and thickness. The type you may use will depend on you and your partner's preference. Novelty condoms can be fun, but they aren't always very strong. They shouldn't be used for penetrative sex.

### Thick or thin condoms?

Whether you are using condoms for vaginal or anal sex – the thickness of the condom will depend on what you are happy with. Some people prefer thicker condoms for anal sex as they feel that they are stronger and less likely to split. If used correctly there is little or no difference in the risk of breakage of good quality condoms, whether you use thick or thin ones.

### What about those that are coated with contraceptive gels?

Some condoms have a coating of contraceptive gel usually Nonoxyl 9 (N-9) on them. However the amount of N9 they contain will not give you any proven benefit with regard to contraception. If you are using condoms as a contraceptive and are concerned about the condom splitting you should use plenty of water-based lubricant and another form of contraception with the condom. Avoid using N9 coated condoms especially for anal sex. Even small amounts of N-9 can irritate the lining of the anus (increasing the risk of HIV transmission).

### Femidoms

You could also try using Femidoms. These are designed for vaginal sex, to go inside a woman. Some people put them inside the anus for anal sex and say they work fine for this. A Femidom can also be worn on the penis like a loose, baggy condom.

If you are using Femidoms, you can use either oil or water based lubricants. This is because Femidoms are made from polyurethane which doesn't rot like rubber when exposed to oil based products. It is still important to use enough lubrication to help prevent the Femidom splitting. If you are using one as a condom it is usually a good idea to take the end 'smaller' ring out as this will make the experience more comfortable. People who have used Femidoms often like them as the woman or receptive partner can take control over their use and they can be inserted before foreplay starts.

### Where do you get them?

You can buy most sorts of condoms from chemists, supermarkets and many other places. You can also get them free from your local GUM (sexual health) clinic, or family planning service.

## HOW SAFE ARE THEY?

When you're buying condoms, check the use-by date. Remember to check it on any condoms you may already have – before you want to use them for having sex.

### Make sure you keep your condoms in a cool place.

Condoms deteriorate rapidly in warm temperatures – and that means they're more likely to split when you try to use them.

Check that the condoms you use have a quality mark – such as the British Standard Kitemark, or the European CEN mark. Either of these marks show that the condoms are of a certain quality.

## ARE THERE DIFFERENT SIZES?

Some people don't like using condoms because they find them too big or too small. People often don't realise that there is quite a variation in the length, width and shape of the condoms available. You might have to shop around, but it's worth trying different ones until you find one you are happy with. You can also try using Femidoms. Finding the particular condoms that work best for you might take a bit of persistence, but it's worth it in the end. And once you've found ones that suit you, stick with them. Smaller condoms often say 'snug fit' on the packet. Condom length and width are usually printed on the packet too.

## DO YOU NEED LUBRICANT?

Whatever kind of sex you're having, you usually need to use more lubricant than the amount already on the condom. Some condoms don't have any at all or have just enough to help roll them on. The amount you need for sex is likely to be completely different.

Using lubricant can mean sex is more comfortable and more enjoyable. It will help make sure the condom doesn't break. Using too little, or the wrong type of lubricant is the main reason why condoms burst, split or break.

All of these lubricants are suitable for use with condoms...  
KY JELLY, WET STUFF, DURAGEL, ASTROGLIDE, PROBE

Lubricants can usually be bought wherever you're buying condoms. Many high street chemists now even produce their own brand of condom-friendly lubricant.

What's important – and what all these types of lubricant have in common – is that they're water-based. They contain no type of oil. Oil of any kind will damage the rubber that almost all condoms are made from.

None of the following are suitable for use with condoms – they all cause rubber to rot.

BABY OIL, SKIN CREAM OR MOISTURISER, VASELINE OR PETROLEUM JELLY, OIL, HAIR GEL, YOGHURT, MASSAGE OIL, COOKING OIL, FAT OR BUTTER, ICE CREAM

## IS IT TRUE?

LOADS OF PEOPLE BELIEVE THINGS ABOUT USING CONDOMS THAT JUST AREN'T TRUE. OFTEN THAT'S THE REASON THINGS GO WRONG.

IT DOESN'T MAKE IT EXTRA SAFE TO WEAR MORE THAN ONE CONDOM. THE FRICTION MEANS THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SPLIT OR COME OFF.

YOU CAN'T WASH AND RE-USE A CONDOM. THEY'RE DESIGNED TO BE USED ONLY ONCE. RE-USE THEM AND THEY'RE LIKELY TO BREAK, AND IT'S NOT VERY HYGIENIC EITHER.

MANY PEOPLE THINK THERE'S NO RISK IF A MAN PENETRATES SOMEONE WITHOUT USING A CONDOM, AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T 'COME'. THERE IS – HIV AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS CAN STILL BE PASSED ON EVEN WITHOUT EJACULATING AND EVEN WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS, MEN OFTEN COME BEFORE THEY THINK THEY'RE GOING TO.

IF YOU START TO PUT A CONDOM ON INSIDE OUT, TURNING IT AROUND AND STARTING AGAIN MEANS ANY PRE-CUM YOU GOT ON THE INSIDE IS NOW ON THE OUTSIDE.

MANY PEOPLE DON'T SEE A NEED TO USE CONDOMS ON SEX TOYS THAT ARE BEING SHARED. THERE IS, BECAUSE SEX TOYS CAN CARRY BODY FLUIDS FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER. IF ANYTHING'S BEEN IN ONE PERSON, IT SHOULD HAVE A FRESH CONDOM ON IT BEFORE IT GOES IN SOMEONE ELSE.

THIS LEAFLET IS FOR YOU IF YOU'VE NEVER USED CONDOMS BEFORE, OR YOU'VE TRIED THEM AND IT HASN'T GONE TOO WELL. IT'LL TELL YOU SOME USEFUL THINGS THAT YOU WON'T FIND IN THE INSTRUCTIONS THAT COME IN A PACKET OF CONDOMS.

SEX SHOULD BE ENJOYABLE, HIV AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS AREN'T. USING A CONDOM WHEN YOU HAVE SEX IS STILL THE BEST WAY TO AVOID GETTING OR PASSING THEM ON.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ONE OF THESE PROBLEMS WITH CONDOMS?

**IT SPLIT OR BROKE  
IT WAS TOO BIG, OR TOO SMALL  
IT CAME OFF INSIDE YOU OR YOUR PARTNER  
YOU COULDN'T GET IT ON PROPERLY  
YOU LOST YOUR ERECTION, OR YOUR PARTNER  
LOST HIS, WHEN TRYING TO PUT IT ON**

THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOT UNUSUAL. MOST PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE OR TWO OF THEM. YOU CAN MAKE CONDOMS WORK FOR YOU WITH A LITTLE PATIENCE AND PRACTICE. TRY PRACTISING ON YOUR OWN, OR WITH YOUR PARTNER, WHEN THERE'S NO PRESSURE ON EITHER OF YOU.

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FOR DETAILS OF TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST CENTRES, INFORMATION AND ADVICE, CONDOMS AND LUBRICANT SEE OUR WEBSITE OR CALL THT DIRECT

[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

THT Direct > 0845 12 21 200

LOW COST CONDOMS CAN BE PURCHASED ONLINE AT:

[www.freedoms-shop.com](http://www.freedoms-shop.com)

The HIV & AIDS charity for life

Website: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk) THT Direct: 0845 12 21 200

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A guide to making condoms work for you

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