

Factsheet **How to use condoms and lubricant**

Key points

- Using condoms correctly will prevent them breaking, leaking or slipping off during sex.
- Use only water-based or silicone lubricants, not oil-based.
- If you lose your erection the condom may slip. Holding the base of the condom will help it stay in place.
- If the condom does slip or break, withdraw immediately and use a new one.



Using a **condom** properly is easy, once someone has learnt how. Correct use will prevent condoms breaking, leaking or slipping off during sex. Here are the most important aspects of condom use. More detailed instructions are given below.

- Choose a condom with a quality mark such as the BSI Kitemark or the European CE mark, and check the expiry date.
- Look after the condom – do not leave unused condoms in direct sunlight, be careful of tearing, using old condoms, leaving space or air in the condom, or not using enough lubrication.
- Use the right kind of lubricant (preferably silicone-based, otherwise water-based) and not the wrong kind of lubricant (oil-based).
- Always expel any air by holding the teat of the condom between thumb and forefinger. This will ensure there is room in the condom for semen.
- Unroll the condom all the way from the tip to the base of the penis when it is hard and before starting sex. Never unroll the condom before putting it on the penis.
- Apply lubricant over the outside of the whole condom. Re-apply during sex if necessary.
- Take time to ensure the condom is put on properly. Rushed application is associated with problems with condoms during sex.
- When pulling out, hold the condom tight to the base of the penis, to prevent leakage.
- Never re-use a condom. Once it is used, throw it away and put on a new one if you start again.

Step-by-step guide

- Open the packet carefully to avoid damaging the condom (jewellery, long fingernails or

careless use of teeth could tear it). The condom comes out rolled up forming a ring which will fit over the penis.

- Put the condom on when the penis is hard and before any kind of penetration begins.
- Check the condom for any visible damage.
- Ensure the condom is the right way up; you can test with a finger that it rolls out and down.
- Keep the penis completely free of grease and lubricant.
- Squeeze the closed end of the condom between the thumb and forefinger to expel the air. Air bubbles can make condoms break.
- Hold the condom over the tip of the penis, using your other hand to carefully unroll it down to the base. It may help to stretch the condom width-ways in order to ease it down the penis and to ensure that it remains in place once penetration begins. But be careful not to pierce the condom with your fingernails when doing this.
- If you have a foreskin, pull it back before covering the head of the penis with the condom.
- Don't try to cover the testicles ('balls') with a condom.
- Smooth the condom to eliminate any air bubbles.
- If you are having anal sex, cover the outside of the condom with a water-based lubricant and put lube inside your partner too. Lubrication may be necessary for vaginal sex too if the vagina feels dry.
- Use only water-based or silicone lubricants. Do NOT use anything oily like Vaseline, petroleum jelly, cooking oils, butter, hand creams or body lotion.
- Withdraw occasionally, to check the condom and to add more lubricant.
- **Never use two condoms at once.** This is more likely to lead to breakage because of rubber rubbing against rubber.
- If you lose your erection the condom may slip. **This is the biggest single cause of condom failure.** Fingers held round the base of the condom will help it stay put.
- If the condom does break or slip off, or you realise it is inside out, withdraw as soon as you find out! Obviously, you will need to use a new one if this happens.
- A condom is more likely to break if sex lasts a long time (longer than 45 minutes). Consider changing the condom during a long sex session.
- After coming (ejaculation) withdraw the penis before it becomes soft (otherwise semen could leak out of the condom). To prevent the condom slipping off your penis at this stage, hold it firmly round the base as you withdraw.
- Throw used condoms away. Dispose of them thoughtfully, e.g. wrapped up in a tissue and then thrown in the rubbish. They shouldn't be flushed down the toilet, since this may cause blockages in sewage disposal.
- Never use a condom more than once.
- Never use the same condom on two people in succession.

Find out more

Condoms Simple factsheet

Female condoms for anal sex Simple factsheet

HIV & sex Information booklet