

Condom: Female

What is a female condom?

The female condom is a 7-inch polyurethane pouch that is inserted into the vagina. It is a barrier method of birth control. It can also protect women against several sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How is it used?

There is a flexible ring at the closed end of the thin, soft pouch. A slightly larger ring is at the open end. The ring at the closed end holds the condom in place in the vagina. The ring at the open end rests outside the vagina against the labia (the skin folds on either side of the opening of the vagina). When the condom is in place during sexual intercourse, there is no contact of the vagina and cervix with the skin of the penis or with secretions from the penis.

The female condom can be inserted up to 8 hours before sex. Follow these instructions for inserting it:

1. Find a comfortable position. Three possible positions are:
 - Standing with one foot on a chair
 - Squatting with your knees apart
 - Lying down with your legs bent and knees apart
2. Hold the female condom with the open end hanging down. Squeeze the inner ring with your thumb and middle finger.
3. Holding the inner ring squeezed together, insert the ring into the vagina and push the inner ring and pouch into the vagina past the pubic bone up to the cervix.

When the condom is properly inserted, the outer ring will hang down slightly outside the vagina.

During sex, it may be helpful to use your hand to guide the penis into the vagina inside the female condom. The condom is lubricated. However, if the condom seems to be sticking to and moving with the penis rather than resting in the vagina, stop and add more lubricant. You can add lubricant to the inside of the condom (near the outer ring) or put it directly on the penis. If you need to use more lubricant, use water-based gels. Avoid using petroleum-based lubricants such as Vaseline. It may damage the material of a condom, making it break and fail to protect you.

To remove the female condom after intercourse:

1. Squeeze and twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside the pouch.
2. Pull the female condom out gently and throw it away in the garbage. Do not flush it down the toilet.

Do not reuse female condoms. Use a new one every time you have intercourse. Also, do not use male and female condoms at the same time. Be careful not to tear the condom with fingernails or sharp objects.

What are the benefits?

- The female condom protects against pregnancy about as well as a diaphragm. Its failure rate with typical use is 27%, which means that 1 in 4 women who use this method may become pregnant. With perfect use the failure rate is 5% or 1 in 20.
- The female condom gives women a way to help protect themselves against some sexually transmitted diseases. As is true of latex and polyurethane condoms for men, neither the AIDS virus (HIV) nor the hepatitis B virus can pass through the female condom.
- The polyurethane is less likely to cause an allergic reaction than a male latex condom.
- The female condom is less likely to break or tear than a male condom.
- You can buy female condoms at the drugstore without a prescription.
- The female condom may be inserted up to 8 hours before sex, so its use does not have to interrupt love-making.
- The female condom helps women share responsibility for the use of condoms with their partners. It is a simple way to protect yourself against certain sexually transmitted diseases as well as avoid an unplanned pregnancy.

What are the disadvantages?

- Each female condom can be used just once and costs \$2.50 to \$5.00.
- The outer ring may hang loosely outside the vagina and make it a little harder for the man to insert his penis.
- Like the male condom, the female condom does not provide complete protection against all STDs. Infections can be transmitted by organisms on areas of the skin that are not covered by the condom. For example, the condom does not provide reliable protection against the herpes simplex virus or the venereal wart virus.
- It has a relatively high failure rate.
- It should not be used at the same time as a male condom.
- Some types of female condoms can make crackling and popping noises during sex, which may be distracting. This is less common if the condom is made with latex or nitrile.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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