

Fact Sheet

Barrier Methods of Contraception – Condoms and Diaphragms

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Barrier methods of contraception work by stopping sperm from getting to the egg.

Barrier methods of contraception include:

- the male condom
- the female condom
- the diaphragm
- Dental dams are NOT contraceptive devices but should be used to protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) if you have oral sex.

Barrier methods need to be used every time you have sex or they will not work.

Condoms also protect you from catching STIs like Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea and HIV.

It is recommended always using a condom, even if you have another method of contraception like the oral contraceptive pill (The Pill), because condoms are the only contraception which also protect against Sexually Transmitted Infections.

The Male Condom

How does it work?

The male condom is a latex (rubber) sheath that is put over the erect (stiff) penis and prevents the sperm from entering the vagina when your partner ejaculates (comes).



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Can I still fall pregnant if I use condoms?

No method of contraception is perfect. If condoms are used absolutely correctly, only 2 out of 100 women will fall pregnant. BUT, because couples do not always use them correctly, on average about 20 out of 100 women fall pregnant when the couple uses condoms.

Where can I get condoms?

- Condoms can be bought at supermarkets, pharmacies and vending machines. They can also be bought online.
- You do not need to see a doctor to get condoms.

What are the advantages (benefits) of using condoms?

- Condoms protect you from STIs as well as pregnancy.
- They can be bought without a prescription.
- Condoms are not expensive.
- Condoms are an option for women who cannot, or do not want to take hormones.

What are the disadvantages (problems) with using condoms?

- They need to be used every time you have sex.
- They can only be used once. You must throw the condom away after it has been used.
- Rarely, people are allergic to the latex (rubber) that condoms are made of. If you or your partner develop an itchy red rash after using condoms, it could be a latex allergy. There are condoms made of polyurethane that you can use in such cases.

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- A condom breaking during sex does not happen often – but if it does, you should see your doctor or pharmacist to get emergency contraception (the morning after pill or intrauterine device). If a condom slips off during sex or you forget to use a condom, you should also get emergency contraception.
[see fact sheet on *Emergency Contraception*]
- Condoms are damaged by sunlight and excessive heat. Do not store them in the glovebox of your car, the pocket of your jeans, or your wallet for long periods of time.

How is a condom used?

It is very important to put the condom on and take it off correctly. This decreases the risk of pregnancy.

Condoms are lubricated to make them easier to use but you may feel you still need extra lubrication to make sex comfortable.

If you are using condoms, you should use a water based lubricant - NOT an oil-based one, as oil can damage the rubber making the condom weaker so that it breaks during sex. Examples of oil-based lubricants are Petroleum jelly (Vaseline™) and massage oils.

- The condom should be put on before the penis touches your partner's genitals to prevent pregnancy, and before you have oral or anal sex to protect you from STIs.
- Check the expiry date before using a condom as the latex weakens with time. Do not use the condom if the use by date has expired.
- Each condom comes in its own packet. When you tear open the packet, make sure you do not damage the condom by ripping it.

Barrier methods of contraception need to be used every time you have sex in order to prevent pregnancy. Male and Female condoms are not only contraceptive devices but also protect you from STIs.

- When you take the condom out of the packet it will look like the one in the picture. Make sure you hold it with the rolled up side at the top, as shown, when you put it on the erect penis. It is important to check the ring is facing upwards by feeling or looking. If you put it on the penis the wrong way around, you will not be able to unroll it (you'll get to know this with practice).
- Hold the condom by the 'nipple' at the end (shown in the picture) and place it like a cap over the erect penis, then carefully and evenly roll it over the shaft of the penis. Using your thumb and two fingers works best.
- After sex, you need to remove the condom before the penis becomes soft. Hold the condom at the base of the penis as you pull out so that the condom does not slip off.
- Then take the condom off and tie a knot at the end so that the semen does not fall out.
- Throw the condom into a rubbish bin.
DO NOT flush condoms down the toilet.

The Female Condom

How does it work?

The female condom is a pre-lubricated sheath made of polyurethane (not rubber/latex) with a soft ring at each end. It is put in the vagina before you have sex and, like the male condom, it stops the sperm from meeting up with the egg. The female condom also reduces the chance that you catch an STI (Sexually transmitted infection).

Can I still fall pregnant if I use the female condom?

No form of contraception is perfect. If the female condom is used correctly, only 2 out of every 100 women will get pregnant but, because couples often do not use it quite correctly, about 20 out of every 100 women who use the female condom will fall pregnant.

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Where can I get the female condoms?

You can get female condoms at most pharmacies, family planning clinics and online.

What are the advantages (benefits) of using a female condom?

- You can get them without seeing a doctor.
- Female condoms decrease the risk of STIs.
- Female condoms are not expensive but they do cost more than male condoms.
- They are the only contraception that protects against pregnancy and STIs and which is controlled by the woman.
- Female condoms are an option for women who cannot, or do not want to take hormones.
- Female condoms are an option for men who may not like the feel of male condoms.
- Some women find the female condom increases the pleasure of sex because the ring outside the vagina may stimulate the clitoris.
- Any lubricant, both water based or oil based (petroleum jelly or massage oil), can be used with the female condom if needed.

What are the disadvantages (problems) of using female condoms?

- They have to be used every time you have sex and put in the vagina before you have sex.
- They are not as easy to buy as the male condom and cost a bit more.
- Some women find it difficult to put the female condom in the vagina. Practising how to do this will make it easier for you both.
- The polyurethane condom can make crinkly or rustling noises during sex which couples may find distracting. There are newer female condoms (called FC2) available, made from synthetic nitrile, which do not have this issue.
- They can only be used once. You have to throw the female condom away after using it.

- Very rarely people are allergic to the polyurethane or lubricant of the female condom.
- Occasionally the condom may move during sex and not catch the sperm when your partner ejaculates (comes). If this has happened, you should see your doctor to get emergency contraception (the morning after pill or intrauterine device). [see our fact sheet on *Emergency Contraception*]

How is the female condom used?

- The female condom must be used every time you have sex and can only be used once.
- Hold the small (inside) ring between your thumb and forefinger and squeeze it from side to side. Slip this end into the vagina and at the top of the vagina let go of the ring which will spring into place.
- The larger (outside) ring will be outside the vagina and rest on the labia (lips) of the vagina.
- Make sure the condom is not twisted in the vagina.
- After sex, remove the female condom by twisting the outer ring and the pulling the condom out of the vagina.
- Wrap the condom into a tissue or plastic bag and throw it into the rubbish bin. DO NOT flush it down the toilet.
- It is important NOT to use a female condom at the same time as the male condom as this may cause them to break or be dislodged.



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The Diaphragm

How does it work?

The diaphragm is a silicone dome which fits over the cervix (the opening from the vagina into the womb) and stops sperm from going into the uterus (womb) by blocking the cervix.

It is important to know that diaphragms do not protect you from catching STIs.

The diaphragm must be put in before you have sex and it must be left in place for 6 hours after sex. This makes sure any sperm still in the vagina have died before you remove the diaphragm.

Can I still fall pregnant if I use a diaphragm?

No contraception is perfect. Even if a diaphragm is used correctly, about 18 out of every 100 women will still fall pregnant. The diaphragm is less reliable (not as good at stopping pregnancy) as condoms and other contraceptive options like the pill.

Where can I get a diaphragm?

The most commonly used diaphragm is called Caya®. This diaphragm comes in one size and should fit most women. It can be bought from pharmacies and family planning clinics as well as online.

Caya® must always be used with a lubricant gel called Caya Gel® which is made of lactic acid. Lactic acid does not kill sperm (it is not spermicidal) but spermicidal gels like Nonoxynol-9 cannot be bought in Australia because they can cause vaginal irritation if used frequently and they also increase the risk of catching HIV. Caya Gel® must be put into the diaphragm (on the side which sits next to the cervix) before the diaphragm is put into place.

Although you do not need to see a doctor to fit the diaphragm (find the right size for you), we still advise that you visit your doctor or make an appointment at your local family planning clinic. They can teach you how to put the diaphragm in correctly and check that it does fit you properly as well as make sure that Caya® is a suitable contraception for you. Women who should not use Caya® include:

- Women who had a baby less than 6 weeks ago.
- Women who have had an abortion or surgery on their cervix in the last 6 weeks.
- Women who need a very large or very small diaphragm, because Caya® will not cover their cervix properly. Your doctor or family planning nurse can check this for you.
- If you have had an illness called Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) in the past. This is a condition which is caused by using tampons, particularly if they are left in the vagina for too long. TSS is a very serious, and occasionally life threatening, condition.
- If you have uterine prolapse (the cervix and uterus dropping down low into or even out of the vagina). In this case Caya® will not stay in position properly.

What are the advantages of using a diaphragm?

- Diaphragms are an option for women who cannot, or do not want to take hormones.
- Women can be in control of their contraception.
- The diaphragm can be put in quite a few hours before sex; not just before sex like condoms.
- It can be used many times (for up to two years).

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Please send your feedback to:

WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au

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What are the disadvantages of using a diaphragm?

- It is not as effective as other methods of contraception.
- It does not protect you against STIs including HIV so, if you want to prevent STIs, your partner should still use a condom.
- Rarely, women who use a diaphragm for contraception find that they get bladder infections more easily.
- Allergies to silicone (which the diaphragm is made of) are very rare but can cause a rash and itching.
- It is not suitable for all women (see above)
- Some women find it tricky to put in correctly, but practising makes it easier.



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How do I put the Caya® diaphragm in correctly?

- Wash your hands before putting your diaphragm in.
- Place at least a teaspoon of Caya Gel® into the top surface of the diaphragm. If you think it will be more than 2 hours before you have sex then you should use more than a teaspoon of gel.
- The Caya Diaphragm has an arrow to show which part should point towards your body and some small dimples at the sides to make it easier to hold as you insert it.

- You should squeeze the dimpled sides together to make the diaphragm into an oval shape and then put it into the vagina like you would a tampon. Then let the sides of the diaphragm go so that it springs into its original shape.
- Make sure the cervix lies in the middle of the diaphragm and is completely covered by it. The cervix is quite hard; it feels a bit like the tip of your nose. Check that the diaphragm is tucked behind the pelvic bone at the front and as far and high as it will go at the back of the vagina.
- Do NOT remove the diaphragm until at least 6 hours after you have had sex.
- Do NOT leave the diaphragm in the vagina for longer than 24 hours.
- To remove the diaphragm, use your finger to hook it out, the shape of the diaphragm makes it easy to place a finger in the dome of diaphragm and remove it.
- Wash the diaphragm with warm water and plain, non-perfumed soap (no disinfectants, detergents or powders should be used) and leave it to air dry before putting it back in its storage case.

How long can diaphragms be reused?

- Most diaphragms should be able to be used for about two years. Check regularly that there are no holes or tears in your diaphragm and throw it away if there are, or if it is looking worn or feels 'tacky' (sticky or rough to touch).

What should I do if my diaphragm falls out, moves or breaks during sex?

If you are worried that this may have happened and that you might fall pregnant speak to your doctor or pharmacist about emergency contraception (the morning after pill or intrauterine device).

Emergency contraception works up to 72 hours after unprotected sex but is most effective if you use it as soon as possible.

[see fact sheet on *Emergency Contraception*]